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APPEAL FROM THE CHURCH

TO THE

H O P E F U L

BUT

NON-PROFESSING HEARER;

WITH SUITABLE REFLECTIONS FOR

PROFESSING CHRISTIANS.

BY THE

REV. HENRY EDWARDS, PH. D., D.D.

LONDON:

G. AND J. DYER, 24, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1844.



LONDON ·

J. HADDON, PRINTER, CASTLE STREET, FINCHBURY.

PREFACE.

THERE are two great errors and evils which have ever been prominent in the universal church ; namely, first, the free and full admission of men unauthorized by scripture doctrine and rule into the “ church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth ;” and, secondly, the ecclesiastical or self-exclusion of real Christians from the obligation and privileges of church communion. The injury which the church has thus sustained, and continues to suffer, is incalculable. On both sides has she been debilitated and defaced ; equally sensible have been the loss and injury to individuals of both classes. Though some few unwarranted to profess have thus found Christ, or rather been found of him, a far greater number have

been either deceived or hardened by the holy vows they had rashly uttered. On the other hand, many sincere Christians have sickened and pined from the want of that aliment which is alone supplied in the church; their tribute and homage to their Saviour and Sovereign have been thus rendered deplorably deficient; and their isolated efforts for the advancement of religion, from their neutral position, attended with but mean success.

It is impossible to say in what number of instances this state of things has been the result of ignorance or carelessness. It is certain, however, that not only those who are comparatively unacquainted with the nature of their present position and their consequent duty, but that also those who are more enlightened, have need to have the subject of profession plainly, fully, and faithfully pressed home to their consideration. As for those whose ignorance is their sin, that ignorance being entirely wilful and voluntary, we do not expect that they will peruse our pages; but, if so, we would remind them that so far from palliating their unchristian course of conduct by turning a deaf ear to the voice of instruction, they fearfully increase sin itself, and their own evil estate.

The subject of profession, if viewed as we have done in its several aspects as affecting different classes of character, is one important and useful to all. It sheds light on scripture duty, and on our religious character, by which all may examine and estimate themselves, and in so doing act honestly to truth. Indifference to profession augurs indifference to religion. Though not one of the vitals of Christianity, it is so linked with these that we dare not separate it from their connexion. Though not the "one thing needful," it is a necessary adjunct to that one thing needful ; and those who can make light of it evidently betray a sad lack either of scriptural knowledge or of religious principle.

Though specifically addressed to the promising non-professor, it has been our object to comprehend all, as the subject has but rarely been thus considered in its general bearings ; and, in so doing, we think we act justly and fairly to all, and also in a way best calculated to influence the character above mentioned, whose strongest and sincerest opposition to his duty arises from causes which are thus shown to be but unreasonable and unworthy scruples. In following up this plan, it

might be said, that we should have formally addressed the professor. But this we believe we have done, if not as fully, yet as effectually as was consistent with our object and our proposed limits. Besides, to address professors may be almost said to be tantamount to addressing Christians. But should we, however, be encouraged by a second edition, we intend to devote another chapter for this end.

The author has no pecuniary interest in this work, having freely given it to the public; and he therefore trusts that those ministers and Christians who feel themselves justified in recommending it, will, by aiding its circulation, kindly subserve the proposed end of the author, which is the purification and enlargement of Christ's church in the world, and especially invite to its pages those to whom they may deem it more peculiarly adapted. And may they both unitedly supplicate Heaven's gracious throne, that the author may be made in this his labour a spiritual blessing, by God blessing the reader in its perusal.

H. E.

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CHAPTER I.

IMPORTANCE OF SECURING RIGHT RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES,
AND THE DANGER OF DECEPTION.

TRUTH is an object which every intelligent being is bound beyond all others to seek and secure. For this end was man endowed by his Creator with those noble and commanding faculties which distinguish him from, and elevate him above, the irrational creation. Truth is the evidently proposed and proper end, and all the varied faculties of the mind the means to its fulfilment, in the creation by God of intellectual natures. Its attainment constitutes the perfection of mind,

its exhibition the perfection of conduct, its ardent pursuit, esteem, and veneration, the perfection of character. Truth and error are direct opposites and antagonists, and that even more than truth and ignorance, as error is generally either fixed, prejudiced, or obstinate ignorance, blinded instead of being illuminated by the very knowledge with which it is associated, immersing the soul in deeper darkness by means of the adjacent light. Truth is valuable, yea, the most valuable of all human possessions; but error is foul and pernicious, the weakness, barrenness, and wretchedness of the soul. It should be our unceasing aim to prize and pursue the one with the same fixed determination, strength, and ardour of mind, with which we renounce and repel the other. And as truth and error are often so nearly allied both in contiguity and feature as to be with difficulty distinguishable, this sifting process, if performed to our advantage and credit, will require all the energy and decision, self-denial and patience, which we can possibly summon to its demands. The evasions of error are innumerable, artful, and beguiling, whilst the certainties of truth are often concealed from the view, lurking in secret and distant recesses. Hence the danger of deception, against which we are so repeatedly and solemnly cautioned in the sacred scriptures. The thought of this should be ever before our attention.

It should be entertained by the mind in all its studies, and meditations, and intellectual converse with mind. We can but mention the fact, as it comes but remotely under our recordation in reference to our object.* Let it, however, never be forgotten, especially where there is a probability of our selfishness or our passions lulling our reason asleep, or causing our thoughts to backslide from truth. We must here be sober and vigilant, or we shall be overpowered by the dazzling and deluding enemy, ever creeping in our path and courting our approbation. All error should be spurned and shunned, but there are some errors which more fatally blind the understanding, pollute the heart, and endanger our welfare; and these should be primarily and most strenuously repressed. There are also certain truths the reception of which is of greater importance, those truths being more extensive and general, more noble and more useful. There are some truths the knowledge of which is almost immaterial, and others, though comparatively interesting and important in themselves, cannot justly claim that insatiable ardour in their pursuit which has been given them, and that by noble minds, because not of transcendent and pre-eminent importance. But this is altogether untrue when applied to religious truths. Of all others,

* The reader may see this subject carried out at full length in "Piety and Intellect relatively Estimated."

these are not only the most important intellectually considered, but the most generally useful in their connexion with human character and interests. They intimately and primarily concern every character, age, and condition, and that throughout the whole of their present finite and future unlimited existence. On the other hand, there are also certain errors which are comparatively innocent and innoxious, the harbouring of which cannot materially affect either ourselves or our fellow-men. It is not thus, however, with religious errors. These are of all others the most disreputable in themselves, and the most dangerous in their consequences. Other errors may be degrading and pernicious, but none so much as these, for if cherished but a short time they will be sure to bring into existence iniquities and miseries, which throughout eternity will never be eradicated or even extenuated. We have already stated that we are all prone to fall into error, yea, to be its willing vassals, the first to foster and the last to repudiate that which we should have boldly rejected at its first offer of darkness. If such is possible and frequent in worldly concerns, in the business of our secular duty, it is equally, yea more so, in religion; a fact alike confirmed by past history, present observation, inward experience, and by the doctrines, statements, and warnings of scripture. "Be not deceived," is reiterated

by the sacred writers, and thrice repeated by the same apostle in one epistle: To be indifferent to religion, is to despise both our own natures and their Author; to lower ourselves to the level of irrational creatures, who act superior to us, because they do not act in a way inferior to that power of instinct with which they are impressed by their Creator. But we may be alike ruined without insensibility. We may be even zealous in religion, and for religion, and yet be the victims and servants of irreligion. Such was the case with the great apostle, ere he was by mercy arrested in that blind, persecuting career wherein he thought he was doing God service. Let us think, let us act, let us judge; but whilst thus employing ourselves in the best way and on the highest subject, let us not once forget the admonition of St. James, "Do not err, my beloved brethren."

Mild and merciful as may be our law and procedure of criminal jurisprudence, and cautious as we may be ere we venture on the life of a fellow-creature, what is recorded of the ancient Spartans proves they were equally, yea more pains-taking and tardy in their proceedings, even against notoriously guilty offenders of their laws. They not only allowed a long interval to elapse before the accused was brought to trial, but also an equal delay when compelled to pass sentence of final condemnation. A stranger once expressing feel-

ings of surprise at this slow progress of justice, and asking for a reason, was answered by the following striking sentiment—"Because mistake in such a case would be an irreparable mistake."

If such is a just feeling in reference to decisions involving only temporal destinies, how far more must, or rather ought, it to be felt as a sacred and momentous truth in that which appertains to our everlasting concernment! With what unwearied patience, with what profound industry and labour, with what agonizing suspense, ought we to search the scriptures, the mine of eternal truth, to ascertain as to those things we believe and act upon, "whether these things are so." Christianity, like every other system of principles, embodies some truths more prominent and important than others, though it should ever be remembered, that the least important she recognizes is very important, far more so than the most important in the whole range of secular knowledge, so that all others, however comparatively great in their respective creed or code must be undervalued by its side, and, if necessary, neglected for its obtainment and observance. There are some truths but indirectly component parts of the grand structure. They lie further from the centre of the system, and nearer the boundaries separating Christianity from mere human philosophy and worldly observances. Not only are there parts of theo-

retic, but also practical Christianity, which may with truth be said to be less essential. Such ought, accordingly, ever to be kept in due proportion and place; the supreme should not be levelled with the subordinate, nor the subordinate be lifted up into equality with the supreme. The mind imbued with that simple love of truth which was the first feature and greatest glory in the mind of Newton, will ever learn thus to distinguish in their judgments on natural things. The same may be observed of the true moralist and religionist, the man endowed with any respect for truth of a higher and holier character, who will learn to discriminate not only as to differences of nature, but also of quality, to which he will be actuated alike by his intellectual and moral bias; for true religion always rectifies and strengthens both the understanding and the heart, imparting a spirit of discernment, which is one of the elements and characteristics of a love of truth, leading the mind not only to seek truth, but also to distinguish between the nature and quality of her acquisitions. To elevate or degrade some truths at the expense of others, is to be unfaithful to truth, which ceases to be truth, when thus disjointed and disproportionate. A philosopher originally means a lover of truth, in which sense every Christian is a philosopher; but though he loves all truth, he primarily and supremely seeks and cherishes in his

mind and heart "the truth" proceeding from "him who is true," by which, like the system and source whence it is derived, he is distinguished and characterized. Now this term, "the truth," is used in scripture as synonymous with the gospel, or the whole of the Christian religion; and its reception is declared, also, to vindicate and prove the Christian character, the whole of personal religion being comprised in the "reception of the truth." To be a Christian, therefore, is to receive, and hold fast, and exemplify the truth, the whole truth, as contained in the scriptures; and, however some may speak of heterodoxy as comparatively harmless, yet it must ever be remembered, that all real heterodoxy is deviation from Christianity; and when influencing the conduct, it is, in proportion to its nature and extent, so much contradiction to the reality of the existence of the Christian character. As the gospel is styled by pre-eminence, the truth, so also may the Christian be styled, the lover, the disciple, the living witness and exemplifier of that truth.

We have made these reflections, not as the groundwork, but solely as introductory to what we are soon going to bring before the reader. But, ere we proceed, we would follow up the course of reflection just offered to his attention, by observing, that we are the last to aggrandize minor points at the expense of the vital, cardinal doc-

trines and duties of our blessed religion. Excessive strictness, a rigorous enaction of minutiae, an unauthorized assumption of supremacy in things controverted by really evangelical Christians, an over scrupulous regard in ourselves or others to matters indifferent in themselves, the spirit and conduct of the pharisee, that would strain at the gnat and swallow the camel ; such temper and conduct are inconsistent with the genius of Christianity, and with the possession of at least an exalted, if not even a low degree of piety, and tend to circumscribe, pervert, and discredit the gospel ; so that, as our Saviour says, those who would enter the kingdom of heaven are thus as much prevented, because prejudiced, by its professors, as by them prohibited.

We are not of those who thus corrupt and mutilate the word of truth. But, then, it should also be considered, that there is another extreme to which we are all liable, namely, the opposite of that just proscribed, which is, the entire suppression or omission of the subordinate in deference to the supreme. To act thus is equally declining from "the truth." We are even disposed to question the genuineness of the principle as seen idolizing higher principles, because a real regard to truth and duty will develop itself in what is little, as well as what is great, according to the declaration of our Saviour, "He that is faithful in that

which is least, is faithful also in much ; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much." In worldly matters, the truth of this is so frequently illustrated and so fully confirmed, as to impress every mind that reflects, beyond a doubt. There may be occasional, or even frequent violations of the ruling principle. There may be, not only neglect, but even contempt manifested towards what is subordinate in their characteristic avocations and pursuits ; but then there will still be on the whole the evidence of greater attention and respect. The avaricious man may occasionally forget to call forth his energies in the practical adoration of that God to whom he has said, "Thou art my hope ;" and even at times regard his character with suspicion, and his conduct with contempt : but such, however, will be but aberrations from the uniform tenor of his course. Thus it is with the real Christian. There is the law of universality stamped on his character and conduct, as there is on his religion ; and hence he will be willing to listen to every separate portion of expounded and enforced Christian truth ; and not only so, but to practise the same, imperfectly indeed at the best, but yet truly, and universally, and consequently sincerely.

We would here just remark, that these reflections are calculated both to censure and hold out to suspicion the character we are about specifically

to address, the hopeful hearer of the gospel, who appears to produce fruits, and give signs of conversion and piety, and at the same time lives in the total neglect of one great branch of Christian duty and privilege, namely, profession. We shall not, however, proceed further on this particular at present, as we shall again return to it shortly, it being our object to address the general reader, and thus prepare the way for addressing that particular class to whom we are writing. Our reason for this is, that it is not always certain or definable who are hopeful hearers ; and thus deception, instead of enlightenment, be the result of our labours. We are peculiarly liable here both to err and lead others into error. It is necessary to mention other classes, and discriminate them, not only for the sake of the general reader,—and such, we trust, we shall have weighing our every sentence in the balances of the scripture, like the noble Bereans,—but also for the benefit of those whom we are specially accosting. We have indeed designed our work for a particular class, but then other claims have not been absent from our minds. We think the consideration of our subject calculated to be useful to all, and whilst we address the promising non-professor, we shall be appealing to all unconverted characters, to all that numerous throng that both claim and disclaim the title of Christian. The false professor and the

backslider may here also learn their present character, and consequently their danger and their duty, as we may thus be led to reveal to them secrets of which they are at present unconscious.

We have been speaking of the importance of truth and the danger of error, because our subject requires caution ; not indeed but that such reflections are necessary as an avenue to every practical admonition. Our subject is one of immense importance ; and, serviceable, honourable, and useful as an intellectual education may be, or superior acquaintance with secular truths, yea, important as it is that we should not be grossly and shamefully ignorant of that knowledge which is necessary to fit us for ordinary society in a land of civilization, it is still infinitely more necessary that we should be acquainted with the first principles of Christianity, and ascertain how they affect us, by studying our relation and attitude to them. And here there must not only be docility to learn, but also to unlearn ; we must not only be ready to be so enlightened by evidence as to be convinced *for*, but also against ourselves. Every true Christian is also a true penitent, and thus exemplifies the docility which is unquestionably an essential feature in the temper of the real Christian ; for he is both convinced against himself that he is a sinner, incapable of self-restoration, and also for himself, that God is able and willing to pardon his trans-

gressions. In the same way it is certain, both from scripture and reason, from the records of observation and experience, that every true Christian is ready, and not only so, but desirous, to hear every thing that can be advanced against the feasibility of his claims, as he is to listen to arguments in his favour. A searching ministry is his delight. Conversion opens the eyes of the blind, and consequently destroys the self-flattering prejudices connected with, and consequent upon, spiritual night in the soul. Hence the reader who has already prejudged us, who has already said in his heart, "Though I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, yet will I not believe," need not have our signet of condemnation applied in the sequel to his peculiar character and condition, as he thereby already notoriously signs his own writ, and pronounces, himself being judge, his own black doom. It would be useless to take a friend whom we wished to profit,—and such is our desire in reference to the reader,—to survey some scenery, or to inspect some works, or examine some manuscripts, if he had previously determined to bandage his eyes. Equally vain is it to address the truth-hardened on this or any other subject, where he perseveringly sustains this character; who, seeing, will see, and not see, and hearing, hear, but not hear. Having long and wilfully refused

to come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved, their heart is "waxed gross, and their eyes they have closed," and God has therefore, in just and righteous retribution for their wicked obstinacy and long-cherished self-delusion, given them over to a reprobate mind, "lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and Christ should heal them."

CHAPTER II.

UNJUSTIFIABLE PROFESSION.

LET us compare the character and condition of professedly Christian nations with the representations of scripture, and we shall discover the two following to be some of the chief and most general errors which have impaired the efficacy, retarded the progress, and sullied the purity of scriptural Christianity,—the profession of its name and character without any one solid scriptural attestation to its truth and reality on the one hand, and the absence of profession with all its proper legitimate adjuncts and effects on the other. It is indeed true we believe that the former practice has been the most pernicious as well as the most general. Owing to this sad spiritual catastrophe, not only has real Christianity degenerated in itself, but it has made less progress in the world, because it has been thus rendered in their estimation, as well as in itself and its alliances, less pure, energetic, and attractive. But though counterfeit profession may

be the most common and crying irregularity and obstruction that has disgraced and weakened the cause of true religion, yet the timid confession, feeble efforts, and unsustained onset of those who had something more of which to boast than name and profession, has equally effectually impeded its progress and shaded its lustre ; for had real Christians only been true to themselves, to their principles, and their Lord and Master, they might have surmounted this formidable barrier, and have marched safely and triumphantly onward toward the millennium. Despite of its ensnaring influence on the human understanding and heart, ever ready to impose deceits on themselves, especially in religion, and even to hug their chains of mental bondage, they might thus have so exposed the falsity of the principle, instilled and cultivated though it be by a deceiving heart, a deceiving world, and an invisible supernatural deceiver, that the profession of the name of Christian, without some scripture qualification, would have been thought as discreditable as it now is to be styled an infidel or a heathen ; and that alike to the party assigning and assuming the holy but profaned appellation ; evincing gross ignorance and flattery on the one hand, and base hypocrisy, assumption, and audacity on the other.

Each of these abuses and contradictions of scripture doctrine and regulation is alike to be

depreciated. It is sinful, we believe, to profess religion without possession, and equally sinful to possess without profession. Both are alike unfaithful and untrue to truth, for the one will profess to be what he is not, and the other will not appear to be what he is ; both thus walking in a cloak of deceit, and both alike bringing Christianity into disgrace, the one by denying it in profession and the other in practice. Each of these may be said to lie to the Holy Ghost. Thus the profession-made minister declares himself "moved by the Holy Ghost" when he is only influenced by the love of worldly lucre or choice of profession, whilst those who really have the Spirit of God are professedly "none of his." Should we not have condemned Moses, and Joshua, and Samuel, and Paul, and other great scripture characters, had they proved "disobedient to the divine vision;" to the message and command which each separately received from heaven? With equal justice and truth must we censure every real Christian who does not obey the oft-repeated and equally solemn and certain message and order from his God and from his Saviour to swear and avow allegiance to him and to his cause before the world. The true child will never feel ashamed or afraid to avow his parentage, nor the soldier his ensign, nor the disciple his professor, nor the debtor his benefactor, nor the sub-

ject his sovereign. Consequently we say, the reality of every man's conversion and piety is very questionable who does not proclaim himself to be a believer,—who by his criminal silence disavows in profession what he appears ready to acknowledge by his conduct and conversation. The classes to which we have just alluded have all their marks and evidences of profession adapted to to each, and where publicity is required it is manifested. How, then, can those reconcile their conduct with their principles, or regard it but with suspicion who deny the reality of those principles and the fact of their relationship by the want of profession; who continue in the world though they hope they are not of the world; who have no outward professed connexion with the church of Christ, though they trust they have inward spiritual union both with the Great Head and his church? How can they so contradict what they profess, and act so inconsistently with themselves; so opposite to all the rest of their creed and of their conduct? They assure us that they hope to have communion hereafter with the church in heaven, and yet they will not hold communion with his church on earth; they hope to “drink of the fruit of the vine with Christ in his Father's kingdom,” and will yet here avowedly, openly, and invariably disobey, and thus practically despise his command, “drink ye *all* of it;” a command

never disobeyed in one instance by his disciples and followers in the time of the apostles ; for there was not known, nor would he, if known, have been recognized, such a character as an unbaptized, non-communing Christian, until error, and worldliness, and apostacy entered and overspread the degenerate church, when the mystery of iniquity ultimately leavened the whole lump.

But not to anticipate what more properly belongs to the subsequent part of our work, let us prepare the way by first considering the causes and the nature and effects of profession without principle, that we may then be better able to address principle without profession. Truth always has two sides or aspects, so that to restrict our attention to the one to the neglect of the other, may be pronounced dangerous, for many doctrines, facts, and arguments, if over-drawn or severed from others abutting them in the boundless range of knowledge, thus verge into error.

If we trace the origin of this wide-spreading degeneracy and mischief, we shall find it, we believe, originating in the rise and establishment of the influence of secular control over ecclesiastical concerns, the dominion of the monarch and magistrate over the members, and discipline, and doctrine, and whole character of the church. From this hydra-headed invention of Satan, as deceptive and alluring as it is dangerous, profess-

ing itself the greatest friend, whilst practically the greatest enemy, men became Christians in abundance, not by force of reason, not by scripture conversion, the only true door where the heavenly Porter stands to welcome the sinner, but by the sword, by law, by fashion, by policy, and by hereditary descent. This was further followed up by ecclesiastics, who in addition to the title of Christian, gave them membership, and made them disciples of the holy Roman Catholic church. Whole nations have thus become professors. This principle has been perpetuated, and Protestant church establishments have made multitudes more of nominal than real Christians, and have confirmed, indirectly, more eyes in blindness than they have ever directly opened. Need we state, in reference to the church establishment of our country, that she admits into her communion those whom all Christians will alike recognize and declare to be unconverted characters, not only as members, but as ministers;* that those who are conformed to the world have as free access to her ordinances and to the *unholy* profession and

* An evangelical clergyman, in a sermon published in the "Pulpit," thus expresses himself: "Do you come to the preaching of the word—to the ministers as to men who are ordained by God (all by his providence, and some by his grace) to speak those words in your ears which shall be the vehicles of the Holy Spirit to your hearts?"

declarations of *holy* devotedness to God and religion, as those who are conformed to the mind and will of Christ; resembling in this particular that church St. John beheld, whose gates were open continually, and shut not day nor night. The disciples, and disciples alone, were called Christians at Antioch; but any thing rather than disciples, yea, the most notoriously immoral and avowed infidels have been christened and confirmed as well as called Christians, yea regenerate Christians; and finally, when there was no more hope of their spiritual than of their natural life, they have "died in *sure and certain* (mark the repetition) hope of a joyful resurrection," and have been declared to be "brothers." It is true that some went in with the apostles who were not of them, but the same apostle who furnishes this information immediately subjoins, that such went out of them, that both they and the true church, and the truth as it is in Jesus, might thus be made manifest. That profession was made in the church alone, by the truly pious, is evident from the following verse: "Praising God, and having favour with all the people, and the Lord added to the church daily *such as should be saved.*" What then can we say of evangelical, pious Christians, who will not only uphold, but actually decry as schismatics those who conscientiously refuse to support a church which not only allows, but ac-

tually encourages not only as members, but as ministers, unconverted characters, that give as clear and convincing evidence of their state as eminent believers do of their being regenerated by the Holy Ghost. This has been the rock on which thousands in all ages of the church have foundered. As men naturally prefer formality, and finery, and outward ceremony and penance, to inward mortification and to simple spiritual worship, so do they prefer an easy profession to the self-denial, and arduousness, and strictness of true religion. The causes that have led men thus to profess are various. We believe we have mentioned the principal external cause. It is certain that this has been one of the lures of Satan, employed by him with masterly skill and wonderful success from the beginning. It originated with him, however much his agency might be concealed, as our Saviour declares in the parable of the sower of the good seed, in which he represents the church as being composed of two great classes, alike from the beginning to the end of the world. "Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, an enemy hath done this." If asked why so many are forward and eager to profess what they do not possess, whilst, on the other hand, many are so backward and over-scrupulous to profess with their tongue "before men," what they feel in their

heart and exhibit in their conversation and conduct, we reply alike in reference to both, "An enemy hath done this." Now this principle of mere nominal Christianity may be seen branching off in innumerable directions, so that thousands thus live and die unacquainted with their condition who might otherwise have never been left blindly secure, however careless in their perilous and distressing religious destitution.

But we are not writing to professed members of the church of England, who trust to her rather than to sound scripture evidence, for hopes of their spiritual safety, and profess without possessing any solid grounds. We are writing to the members and attendants in dissenting congregations and churches. We could not, however, but notice this great and grievous error, as seen in the greater extension, as transmitted from the Romish church to our own, influencing her doctrines, and precepts, and ceremonies, and institutions. Its injurious influence may be and often is arrested by the ministrations of pious ministers, who decry profession without principle. Yet still it is certain that many have and do continue to place their hopes of salvation not on Jesus Christ and scriptural conversion (not conversion from one sect to another), thus associated by the apostle as necessary the one to the other, Christ being a Saviour really and effectually only to converted and sanctified

believers, "If any man *is* in Christ Jesus he *is* a new creature,"—but on Jesus Christ and churchmanship. We need not, however, wander to the church, as we may discover profession without the necessary principle to warrant it, if not as glaring and frequent, yet as real and as visible, amongst ourselves as in the establishment. And in order to point out the danger, as well as to show the nature of this false profession, let us endeavour to trace out some of its sources. We are not, of course, alluding to those who have wilfully imposed on others, but to those who have ignorantly imposed on themselves. One of these is false or else inadequate conceptions of what constitutes true religion. There are some who are educated in religion; brought up, like Timothy, in the tuition of the Lord. They are carefully preserved from all that might contaminate their principles or lessen that respect for religion and for pious ministers and Christians which is with them a naturally acquired and cherished rather than a spiritual feeling and disposition. They have not only enjoyed constraining influences and extraordinary aids to a speculative acquaintance with real religion, but have never been exposed to temptations and to worldliness, and hence both themselves and others cannot distinguish them from those who, though perhaps equally moral, amiable, and engaging, yet give no such evidence of Christian

attainment. It cannot be too often repeated and urged on the consciences and careful examination of all professing Christians, that grace and nature oftentimes closely resemble one another, especially in some characters and particulars, and that there may be all the appearances of conversion without the reality. Yea, many who have only the appearance may seem more fair, and excite greater hope and confidence as to their piety than those who have the reality. Had we seen the house built upon the sand, without narrowly inspecting the foundation, we might have preferred it for our residence to that erected on the rock. Such characters are perhaps very strongly, and so therefore injudiciously, pressed into a church, by relatives and friends, especially parents; not, indeed, that either ministers or churches can object to admit them, for if so, they would shut out thousands of really converted characters. They can but act after careful deliberation, from their best judgment, according to appearances. There are others who have only occasional but yet very powerful convictions. The imagination has been excited, the feelings highly wrought, yea, the understanding convinced, and the conduct changed; and yet no spiritual life has been infused by the Holy Ghost into a converted soul. They run well for a time, but are soon hindered. They have no root, and wither away. Or if they maintain a fair form

of godliness, it is evident that it is unassociated with the power. Their religion consisted of novelty and excitement; it arose with some popular preacher, or solemn and affecting discourse, or some awe-striking providence, and is no more permanent and substantial than its origin.

Sometimes persons are influenced to make a profession of religion by the influence of mere example. If true Christians, they do well to follow such patterns as are thus presented to their imitation. If not they assume a name and character to which they have no title. Susceptibility of soul and new lively impressions, for such religious impressions always are to persons who after long slumbering in worldliness, for the first time feel the power of the world to come, afflictions producing dissatisfaction with the world, though not terminating in a fundamental change of character; party spirit, love of religious controversy, restlessness and versatility of disposition, with many other causes, often lead many to adopt the language of Canaan, and to name the name of Christ, although they have not yet departed from all iniquity. They have easily acquired evangelical sentiments, but these sentiments are not feelings. They have adopted external public manners, and habits, and talk of professing, and perhaps real Christians; so that, like the darnel, they are only with great difficulty to be distinguished from the

precious grain. They are delighted with the promises, but displeased with the duties of Christianity; and as all promises are conditional, and obedience is as necessary to constitute the real Christian as faith, and the reality of saving faith is only to be known to ourselves or others by the reality of its fruits, they have hence no solid scriptural claims to the title they assume. Others are induced to enter from the easy terms and open arms with which they are received even by some dissenting churches, not to mention our Wesleyan brethren. We are the last to narrow the terms and conditions of admission. We would offer a free invitation, as we are about to do, to all who have the mark of Christ on their foreheads. We would not erect a harsh, authoritative, inquisitorial board, but all we require is what every Christian should first demand of himself, ere he thus discharged his duty to Christ, to himself, to the church, and to the world—"Am I a true Christian?" In every similar world of engagement and association, examination is required. An ordeal must be submitted to, and shall this be the case in minor things, and yet the practice be discarded in that wherein, as we have shown from human intellect and character, it is most required, and where, from the nature of the matter investigated, it is most important. Owing either to some influential parties in the church, or else to the

minister wishing to show "proofs of his ministry," and make a display of his usefulness, the opposite extreme to tardiness is resorted to, and parties are hastily and rashly introduced into a church without sufficient satisfactory evidence of any claims to the only just admitting qualification. Sometimes it is the work of relatives and friends, who will alike make church members and even ministers, whom Christ has never accepted. Our feelings of consanguinity, and our esteem and respect for moral excellencies, ought never to be carried to such an extreme. Parents in humble life may with equal justice and fitness think of making a talented son a barrister, or a senator, or statesman, as of raising any to this far greater and more lustrous distinction and dignity, for here the grace of God ought to be the sole supreme agent and inducement. Not, indeed, but that both parents and ministers are to exhort, and even importune, *real* Christians to make a profession, for this is as much their duty as it is to invite sinners to come to Christ. The only ground of complaint is that they are not actuated by and proceeding upon scriptural principles.

Others have made a profession of religion, trusting not so much to their own experience as to the good opinion and favourable testimony of others. This is a false refuge. Such might have been the most competent of judges, the examination insti-

tuted might have been most rigid, its results appeared most triumphant in favour of the applicant, but, as we have already stated, no church, no minister, however great and good judges, are here infallible. God alone sees and knows the heart. And if even false Christs, who made their appearance, could almost deceive the very elect, surely in such a case as this, where there is no such certainty, occasional deception, even in the most favourable instances, is not only probable, but even certain.

We shall not assign any further reasons for this very common self-deception. We have said enough to try, and weigh, and cast the false professor, or at least to make all suspicious, and also to lead the applicant for church-membership seriously to examine himself. Hence, then, we would not encourage many of the applications commonly made to our religious societies, whilst we would, at the same time, make each one we receive responsible to God rather than ourselves, and would still inculcate, even on such, watchfulness, caution, and fear.

Thus the reader will discover, that we are far from tolerating, much less encouraging, the idea of any sanctity or virtue as connected with profession. We have not only stated, but even enlarged, and illustrated, and admonished on the fact, that profession is not possession. Though a part of

true personal religion, it is not the whole ; though very necessary, useful, and ornamental, it is not an absolute essential ; it is but a branch, and not the root ; and though indeed its absence leads us to call in question the reality of possession, yet its presence does not certainly indicate the existence of that of which it is but a sign and an affirmation. "The kingdom of God is not in word" (knowledge and profession) "but in power." To trust, therefore, to any profession, is as idle and as irrational as to attempt to trust to our arms for flight, as birds to their wings. It is but the shadow, the expression, and not the thing signified ; and, as the most chaste and beautiful residence may have no occupant, so may the most holy profession be empty, as void of meaning, yea as contrary to truth and reality, as the numerous professions of politeness known in the upper walks of fashionable life. Look at the world in all its various ranks and changing characters and circumstances. Is it not half made up of mere profession ? And is it not to be feared, in a day when the profession of religion is fashionable, when there is almost every worldly incitement to urge many to imitate the young man "who was not far from the kingdom of heaven," that it should hold the same with the external church ?

It is important not only that professors, but those also who contemplate entering into their

ranks, should remember this, and should set out with the entire abandonment of all dependence on a profession of religion. How often have once warm and zealous converts, after profession relaxed in their efforts, slumbered at their post, and even permitted their corruptions and passions to acquire a fell and fatal ascendancy, so that they have backslidden, rather than advanced; and all this has been the result of a reliance on what has past in their own former experience, and on the supposed virtues of church-fellowship. This delusive hope, grounded on assumed conversion, has not only been injurious to real Christians, but also destructive to many who might otherwise have been truly enlightened, who might have more closely and correctly examined their evidences, and who might have been alarmed and converted. Let the professor, however excellent his character and great his religious reputation in the church, call to mind that conversion and sanctification, and not profession, are the sure infallible token and seal of a child of God. Let them reflect on what we have already said of the ready reception which religious error is calculated to meet with in our lapsed intellectual and moral natures, and on the multitudes who have in all ages been deceiving both themselves and others. Let them call to mind the declarations of our Lord, who informs us in the sermon on the mount, that there will be

many false professors, yea, and ministers, and that of high standing, condemned by him, whom they professed to serve. Our Saviour, in the parable of the man who sowed good seed in the field, most fully states this fact ; his words proving that there will be many false professors, even in the millenium. "Let both grow together *until* the harvest," that is, the end of the world. Let them glance at the facts of scripture, at its exhortations, statements, and warnings, and at the records of church history, and the testimony of many experienced ministers, and they will give us credit for our cautions.

The apostles were gifted with inspiration, and their converts, as well as they, with the power of discerning spirits, the temptations of a mere secular nature or mere secondary motives, good indeed in themselves, though not sufficient to evince the conjunction of sincerity with reality, could then have no power to deceive, and yet how many false professors and apostates were admitted into the purest of churches is evident from a number of passages. See Philippians iii. 18, and the whole of Jude. Were there not danger of foundering on this shoal, the apostles would not have been so minute and careful in describing the characteristic fruits of that change of heart and life which constitutes alike the origin and proves the reality of the Christian character. But, though

the proper evidences are not always discovered, they are yet discoverable, not perhaps to a church, but most certainly to the individual.

Let, then, all professing Christians try themselves by scripture rules, comparing the false and the real, the good and fruit-producing hearer with the other three classes, the unsteady and the steadfast, the temporary and occasional, and the constant and persevering, the self-interested and the disinterested, the penitent and lowly with the self-confident and high-minded, the formal and lukewarm and the devotional and zealous, the carnally and worldly-minded with the spiritually and heavenly-minded. In fine, let each seriously and deeply study the every characteristic of a dead and of a living profession, of a true and of a counterfeit personal Christianity ; and if conscience accuses the investigator, assuring him that his profession is a delusion, and his hope a fabrication of the great and deceptive enemy of his soul, let him not undo or retract what is in itself obligatory, holy, and honourable, but immediately seek the wedding-garment of true conversion and vital, heartfelt, walking Christianity, which shall both enrich and ennoble himself and his profession, his church, and his Master in heaven.

These evidences are not vague, and uncertain, and difficult to obtain. It is true we are liable to err, but this error originates in ourselves ; it is be-

cause we will not, rather than cannot, search and see into this solemn matter. The requisite knowledge to undeceive or to assure, is alike simple, various, and easily attained. The fatal error, therefore, though common, is a sin, and not a defect, one which, like all those of a directly practical nature, we must cautiously and earnestly repudiate. Were not this the fact, the apostle would not have so urgently admonished the Corinthians, in words implying alike our proneness to spiritual delusion, and the possibility and the duty of ascertaining whether we are in truth, as well as profession, "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove yourselves; know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates."

And as it is thus necessary to caution the church-member against relying on his profession, so is it equally incumbent on us to guard him against resting in it, and depending on the ordinances, and the means of grace and privileges with which it is connected. Thus St. Peter tells us not to depend on outward baptism, but on the inward baptism by the Holy Ghost, who can alone make us regenerate. "Baptism doth also now save us; not the putting away of the filth of the flesh," that is, not the mere act of pouring water; "but the answer of a good conscience towards God." The

ancient Israelites thus trusted to circumcision, though even Moses might have taught them that this alone was valueless. "Circumcise," says he, "the foreskin of your heart." And he also foretells them, "The Son of God will circumcise thine heart." Jeremiah says, "All the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart." And in order to instil the same principle, which was contradicted alike by many Christians of his day as in every other age, not to mention the disciples of the Judaizing teachers, and such teachers have ever remained to corrupt the church, the apostle says, "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." How many, however, who might, who ought to have been wiser than such folly, have dressed themselves off in a professor's habiliments, only just in order to stop the noise of a too troublesome conscience, to build up a little self-righteousness for themselves, or to gain a character, either with men or with God, for sanctity enough to bring them to heaven.

Profession, if sincerely true, is indeed an act well-pleasing to God. It is to follow Christ, to confess Christ, and to honour Christ. But then, the performance of one part of religious duty, can-

not atone for the neglect of another. Yea, the professor is under infinitely augmented motives and obligations to be a greater and better Christian than previous to his solemn covenant with Christ and the church, and his public testimony before a critical, lynx-eyed world. But, owing to partial ignorance, or spiritual pride or self-flattery, the professor often seems to think, that when he made a profession he has done all, or, if not carrying it to such an extreme, he seems disposed to act on the principle, that his religion now need only to be a composition of negatives, that it is not to be expected, that the fervour and greatness of his former devotedness and spiritual elevation shall characterize his future footsteps. And the estimate and expressed judgment of a world as blind as it is censorious often confirms this; for though sometimes the last, they are also often the first, to make each professor a saint, although martyrdom itself is wholly insufficient to make that of which the Holy Ghost is alone Creator. Let worldly, half-dormant, careless, inconstant, and mere talkative professors, no longer allow themselves to settle down in a state of spiritual quiescence. Profession will censure, but cannot justify such a spirit and conduct. It is, in fact, to deny our profession. If we impress our profession as a seal on Christianity, Christianity must also impress her seal on our profession. We become false to our

profession, traitors to the church, and hypocrites to the world, not only as we decline from the form and semblance, and outward sanctity, but also as we decline from the act and spirit of our religion. Others make too much of the ordinances and privileges of profession ; for instance, those of baptism and the Lord's supper, the extra grace and strength which they believe God gives on a profession of religion, and the many religious advantages ensuing from it, both directly and indirectly. But it should never be absent from our mind, that not only the same duties are obligatory, but the same difficulties and temptations, though perhaps alleviated, still follow ; that these have no virtue in themselves, being only means, and means often perverted, and thus polluting and criminating ; and that all the advices, and precepts, and admonitions recorded in the epistles, are given to professors. Let the fate of churches nourished even by inspired apostles, teach both churches and individual members not to trust in their privileges. Profession implies that we are no longer asleep, but have awoken from the dead slumbers of a benighted, perishing world ; let it not lead us to relapse into that moral torpor from which it professes to have emancipated. Let it not degenerate into a mere adherence to orthodoxy, a systematic routine of what may be styled a professor's professional duties, a fair and faultless outside to the world, idle

religious conversation with other professors, all of which may originate merely in their common position, and conversation, and habits as professors, and thus no more really religious than any other professional phraseology. Let those who have just set out in this their public career of discipleship, or rather such as have not yet entered into the profession of Christianity, be satisfied with creeping; but let the professor of some standing be ever "mounting on the wings of eagles." So far from wishing, or being contented to do nothing but repose by the side of the still waters, let them gird themselves for their journey, and pursue its straightforward path with greater alacrity. Let them not take off their armour, or diminish the number, or lower the quality of their weapons; but fight closer and more courageously the enemy every where about their path. Let the non-professor, or the new professor, stop to parley with the enemy; but they whom profession ought to have confirmed, not disabled, must flee, and, like the Scythian, conquer by flight. The vows of God are upon you, professor! Not only your backslidings before the world, but your negligence, and omissions, and slow advances in personal piety and Christian usefulness, entail far greater shame, and reproach, and guilt, not only on you, but on your church, as well as bring greater suspicion and discredit on the reality of your standing on the right foundation, than if you

had never made a profession. "Grow in grace" is not only your duty and privilege, but the evidence of the genuineness of your profession. Remember that grace never produces less than thirty fold, and that *real* grace is not only always desiring and striving, but also succeeding in making progress. Retarded and thrown back at times it may be, but still ever counterbalancing such failures and hindrances by additional marches, perpetually gaining though occasionally losing. Should not your experience verify this statement, why it is certain you must be either a guilty, wretched, desponding, and distracted backslider, or else callous and blinded by that very preaching and profession which ought to have made you more sensitive, more suspicious of self, and though in the church, and most forward of its members, you are but an intruder, a stranger, and a foreigner.

The evils arising from admission of false professors, lax communion, and the absence of church discipline, to the cause and progress of true religion, are great and manifold.

This fact must be evident from the very nature of true Christianity, which is as essentially opposed to worldliness, not to predicate any thing worse, as we often might be justified in doing, of a multitude of mere glossy professors, as light is to darkness. No man can serve two contrary masters, and yet be a Christian; so no church can have two

opposite classes of members, and be justly styled a Christian church. It cannot be too often repeated, that our religion has far more to fear from its nominal and inconsistent adherents than from its most open, rancorous, and daring enemies. The line of demarcation between the world and the church, the followers of Christ and of the god of this world, can never be two strongly drawn. The church of Christ is thus alike weakened and injured, as much as a regiment whose every other soldier, instead of being a disciplined trooper, was a raw stripling, unable to manage a single weapon of war. Or such a church as we have been supposing, and such there really are, rather resembles an army, half of whose soldiers are disposed at the very first serious onset to play the deserter or the traitor, and thus discouraging the whole army, strengthen rather than weaken the forces, the courage, and confidence of the enemy. Each stone that composed Solomon's temple was prepared before its being allowed a place in that glorious edifice. The beauty and strength of that rich, noble structure would have been impaired, if not destroyed, had any of its stones been conveyed from the quarry in their rough and unhewn state. It is the same with the holy beauty of that Christian temple of which Christ is the corner-stone. None but the subjects of true conversion can be safely and properly admitted into that building.

Let those who have never been truly enlightened, humbled, and renewed by the Holy Spirit, enter and increase in a church, and just in such proportion will the form of godliness be substituted for the power, and every thing of a truly spiritual and improving nature and tendency wither away, like the seed that fell upon stony places, which was scorched as soon as the sun began to shine with burning ray. The first Christian churches were composed of "saints and faithful brethren," "them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." The apostle, urging the Corinthians to exclude the incestuous offender, reminds them that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." How large, how particular, and how severe were his instructions on this matter! thus illustrating and proving the truth of what he here states, and showing his "godly jealousy over them," in his absorbing anxiety to maintain church discipline, and preserve their peace, purity, and usefulness, all of which are endangered even by the toleration of but one backslider. The subject of church discipline forms also a large part of our Saviour's address to the seven churches. Hence we observe, that not only must every church be strict, we do not mean captious, reserved, or sullen, in the admission of members, but also exercise care and vigilance over those already enrolled, lest Satan by any means get an advantage over them, and the

preaching of the gospel prove vain. Not only the conduct and the character, both of applicants and members, must be continually and warily scrutinized, but their principles examined; for once allow any fatal error to find by stealth a home in any church, and the whole pillar of divine truth which supports and adorns the edifice shall totter and fall, and every soul will receive the blast, if it does not wither, when either sin or error continues tolerated in a church. How solemn alike the responsibility both of applicant and church appears, especially that of the former, when we read such a sentence as this: "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." Well, therefore, may we to this add the words of the same apostle: "Looking *diligently*, lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." If the church may justly arraign the world, the world with equal justice may arraign the church. The latter has alike discredited, and calumniated, and retarded the holy cause of revealed religion, which she has been commissioned not only to proclaim, but also to exhibit before the world; to recommend not only by wise instruction, but also by holy example. Owing to her negligence, sin, and folly; owing alike to her strictness and her looseness, her inconsistencies,

her unfulfilled pledges, her zeal without knowledge, and her knowledge without zeal, she has not even faithfully exhibited the correct semblance, much less the reality, of that religion she professed. Jesus Christ has been wounded in the house of his friends. His cross has lost its charm, his word its power ; his name has been blasphemed by the carelessness, the uncharitableness, the moral laxity, the want of discipline, and the worldly, base alloy mixed up with the gold of the sanctuary. The natural prejudices of the human heart have been thus augmented instead of being allayed, and men, already predisposed to regard the gospel in a false, namely, unamiable, unattractive light, have thus been still further alienated and repelled.

It has always been the aim and object of Satan and of the world to mimic the work and operations of God in his dealings towards the church. The true has always been succeeded by the false, the real coin by the counterfeit ; so that all false religion may be traced up to this source. God sets himself up as an object of religious worship, and men immediately invent false gods and tender false worship. His ministers work miracles in Egypt, which are directly imitated by their magicians. Sacrifices are instituted to typify Christ, the great and only true Sacrifice, and the idolatrous nations follow the same example. God raises up prophets, appoints a sanctuary, and ordains a regular

successive order of priesthood, and the heathens have their oracles, sybils, temples, and priests. God inspired men to publish his will, and his people to transmit the sacred scriptures, and the Romans had their sacred books kept inviolate, the Hindoos their shastres, and the false prophet his alcoran. The Son of God appears, and no sooner does he ascend to his glory than false Christs arise in rapid succession, so flattering and deceptive as to delude, if it were possible, the very elect. Our Saviour erects a pure system of worship and a true church, [and even his apostles are confronted by Judaizing teachers, and "false apostles transforming themselves into the ministers of Christ." Antichrists already begin to work, and shortly there arises out of the murky, bottomless pit, "the man of sin." The man of sin is wounded, and no sooner is protestantism established, than there are false protestants—Lauds, who would mutilate the great and good work of reformation, and impede its progress. In fine, to apply these remarks to the subject in hand, God has been declaring to his church in every age, "Let him that beareth the vessels of the Lord be clean." "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "Come out from amongst them, and be ye separate." "Let my church below resemble my church above." And when his commands have been disobeyed, he has ever expressed his disapprobation

and the dishonour inflicted on his name. "In setting their thresholds by my thresholds, and their posts by my posts, they have defiled my holy name." But the wily adversary has ever been labouring to mix up the wine of his fornication with the pure wine of the sanctuary. And his adherents in the world, inspired by his instructions, have ever been striving by dint of specious duplicity, to amalgamate the church and the world, to break down the barriers of separation, and to let in the floodgates of worldliness to defile and destroy the spiritual church,

"——— And with cursed things
His holy rites and solemn feasts profaned,
And with their darkness durst affront his light."

Whilst Pharmases was making preparations of war against Cæsar, he at the same time sent him a crown. The great Roman, rejecting his munificence, assured him that when he desisted from his hostile preparations he would then, but not till then, accept of the crown. Thus it is with many, in reference to religion, in their conduct towards God, and in God's declarations to them. They would crown him in profession, but dethrone him in conduct. But the Almighty is not to be duped or bribed by any mere profession, but will act towards those who thus act towards him, as did the Roman towards this perfidious oriental monarch.

True it is, we can never expect a perfectly pure church in this world, such as that "into which nothing that defileth entereth," but we may expect, yea, we must have, a far purer church than is now existing. May heaven stir up the real church of every denomination to sift the sieve, not as Satan does to damage the wheat and spare the chaff, but as God does to purify; and no sooner shall she thus arise and shake himself from the dust, and dip her wings in the pure healing streams of the river of God, than she shall also put on her loveliest garments, be beautified with salvation, appear the joy of the whole earth, whilst the voice of God that is ever acting whilst speaking, shall address her both by his providence and Spirit, within and without her holy borders, "Arise and shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

CHAPTER III.

NATURE AND EVIDENCES OF TRUE CONVERSION.

WE have already stated that the only ground which can possibly justify a profession of religion in any case, is scriptural conversion. It will be unnecessary for us, we hope, to expatiate on the reasons for this, considering the classes we address particularly, after the remarks we have made and the principles we have established. Whether we examine the doctrines, the precepts, or even the promises of scripture, the evidence of the truth of the statement glares upon us alike from one as from all. The promises of God are always restricted in their application, and necessarily suppose and imperatively demand a preparedness for their reception and enjoyment. They are spiritual, and can therefore only be inherited as they can only be properly appreciated, enjoyed, and honoured, by the spiritual; for how can that which is entirely carnal, and such are the unregenerate, attain to that which is entirely spiritual?

“It is the Spirit alone that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.” Whosoever believeth not on him, whosoever is not united to him as the branch is to the vine, whether he be the most moral or the most immoral of men, the “wrath of God abideth on him.” Is it to be for a moment imagined, that a holy God can hold communion with an unholy creature, and such is the degeneracy of human nature, that we are all alike unholy and abominable in his sight out of Christ? Dare a cursed outcast sit down and regale himself at the table of his Lord without permission? Will a disobedient child, who has made himself a prodigal, and has hence been forbidden his father’s house, and who has never been reconciled and restored to his favour, but continues wandering from Zion, his frown ever imprinted like a black scar on his countenance,—will he so far outrage decency as to presume to sit down at his table like one of his dear children on whom he is always smiling? Can a cursed Cain, with the ban of God’s displeasure every where resting on him, expect to enjoy the portion and privileges of righteous Abel? Can any presume so to despise and injure themselves, the benevolent, hospitable, sumptuous Inviter, the guests, and the banquet, as to come to the greatest, the most honourable, and the most happy wedding-feast, without a suitable attire; in the meanest, instead of the

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richest apparel? Equally unwarranted and presuming is it for any to "keep the feast" of the gospel without the wedding garment of justification by faith, and sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Without these qualifications, to profess the name, and to partake of the sacraments of Christ, is nothing but pollution and sacrilege. Destitute of vital religion, "he that eateth, eateth damnation to himself."

But though all men, when unrenewed, are altogether unfit, and consequently unwelcome, thus to hold forth and show by their profession the death of Christ, and must in so doing offend rather than please God; yet how constantly do we hear ministers of religion, as they declare themselves and others believe them to be, actually enjoining participation in the sacred cup as a duty incumbent on mere national and nominal Christians. Yea, they even go so far as to attempt to justify such unscriptural procedure, on the miserable pretence that it receives countenance from that long exploded system which Christianity has partially, and will soon, we trust, entirely overthrow. Because all Israelites, the natural as well as the spiritual children of Abraham, were admitted into the Jewish church, and participated in its privileges as well as in its professions, hence they would argue that all nominal Christians, all born and educated in a Christian land, have equal right

to the sacraments of Christianity, and can only be unlawfully prohibited. But, not to mention other particulars, does not that law point out the duty of exclusion? Thus, if a man had a leprous garment, or a garment any otherwise made unclean, his company was to be avoided, Lev. xv. 4. God commands them "not to plough with an ox and ass together," Deut. xxii. 10, the former being clean and the latter unclean, thus showing that God's people and the unsanctified must not be yoked together. It is astonishing how many doctrines and practices, as opposed to scriptural Christianity as Romanism, have been thus defended. It is one of the clearest and most certain principles of logic, that no argument can be founded on mere comparison or analogy, where there does not exist exact congruity so as to allow of transposition of parts. Nothing can be a surer mark of a weak and wretched foundation as a stand for any doctrine or practice, than when its advocate is thus driven back to that economy concerning which our Saviour himself declared, "It is finished." It is true we may thus appropriately illustrate the truths of Christianity, as the apostle Paul does especially in his epistle to the Hebrews; but then we can no more establish any one part of our sectarian creed, ceremony, and institution from Judaism, than we can the whole. As well might such Judaizing teachers attempt to argue that it was the duty of our country,

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as a Christian nation, to massacre and extirpate the Chinese, being gross and abominable idolaters, as did the Israelites the Canaanites ; yea, as well might they attempt to prevail over the New Testament religion by an appeal to the koran. And here we feel constrained to allude to what has been the main prop of papists as well as of protestant popery,—we refer to the holy fathers. We may, indeed, argue from the example and recorded sentiments of the immediate successors of the apostles, but if in place of corroborating, we thus alone attempt to establish our argument, we shall as wantonly err as in the other case. If the fathers were divinely inspired, it behoveth us meekly and reverently to obey their instruction and follow their examples. But we know that many of them were of “the synagogue of Satan,” and like Judas Iscariot, were only inspired by the prince of darkness. As for the other fathers, they would, if permitted, rise from their ashes to condemn their idolatrous admirers and perverters.

Alas, how many have injured instead of benefited themselves by a religious profession ! How many have been spiritually starved instead of feasted at the Lord’s table ! How many tasted of the cup when it was too late ! How often is this applied as a sweet and holy unction to the departing soul, who is pronounced safe and sure for heaven, not because he

was born of the Spirit, but because he had been baptized, confirmed, and had partaken of the Lord's supper. What efficacy can there be in that which derives all its efficacy from faith, when faith is wanting? or what virtue in the profession and ordinances of religion, which are only channels of communication and means of grace, where there is no correspondence and sympathy between the parties whom they are designed to unite, that they might honour the one and bless the other, glorify that God that appoints them, and save the sinner that applies them? To those who are lifeless, these also must be lifeless; to those that are fruitless, these also are fruitless. It is conversion of the soul alone that can convert these sacraments into means of grace to the soul. We are not speaking now of mere out-door means and privileges—these we dare not deny to any one; these it is our duty to bestow as liberally as we have power upon all. And it is the duty of all to attend on these means. The multitude may gaze on the palace, or assist in its erection, or even be menials within its walls, but none but the children of the kingdom can rightfully assume the title of prince, and sit down at the royal table.

If we attentively study the different passages in the Acts and epistles which refer to the subject we are now treating, we shall not discover one passage in which a profession of Christianity is,

even in the least, tolerated, apart from its character; whilst there are a great number which, in absolute terms, prescribe the duty of making a profession, as being only a duty consequent upon, and not preceding, the primary duty of believing and receiving Christianity. The apostle says, speaking of the Macedonians, in his second epistle to the Corinthians, "And this they did, not as we hoped; but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." The former duty of profession grows out of the latter, which enjoins excommunication when any "make manifest" that they are not really Christians; and which censure, in severest terms, the admixture of Christ with Be-lial, of converted with unconverted characters. It is to us matter of astonishment, that true, converted, evangelical ministers, should remain in a church where they are compelled to receive all that come, in direct contravention of the express, emphatic, and solemn injunction of the apostle, "With such a man, no not to eat." How contrary to their own principles and declarations! Take, for instance, the following quotation from Burkitt:—"If civil eating with scandalous professors of religion be forbidden at our own table, much less ought any church to permit and suffer them a religious eating at the Lord's table, which was never spread for such guests." What can be clearer and stronger, if attentively considered, than

these words of the apostle—"But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother" (any man professing to be a Christian) "be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner: with such an one, *no, not* to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." Is not the church here regarded as composed of converted characters alone, and as condemning herself when she does not condemn inconsistent professors? Would that our brethren in the establishment, discerning these scripture truths, and made sensible, by the rise and spread of Puseyism, of the undisguised and dangerous sympathy and relationship subsisting between the church of England and the church of Rome, and alarmed and jealous for the honour and integrity of protestantism, would, like the magnanimous apostle, no longer parley with flesh and blood, but at once act up to their principles, and come out of Babylon; instead of boasting and glorying in a church which, if pure, would never have originated and harboured the heresy of Puseyism. If they will not, however, listen to us, let them hear the words of the apostle Paul:—"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven

leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened."

A profession of religion, without any creditable claim to its possession, is, and only can be, an insult as well as an injury to Christ, to his followers, and to his religion. By profession we assume to be what we profess, namely, members of Christ's body. But what does our Saviour say to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Without regeneration and sanctification, to which our Lord here refers, we are no more really Christians,—however orthodox our creed, however moral our conduct,—than the vilest idolaters. To profess, therefore, without being scripturally entitled to do so, is to act spiritually the part of Ananias, it is to keep back part of the price, and to lie to the Holy Ghost. We do, indeed, peremptorily pronounce it to be every man's duty to profess religion, because it is every man's duty to be religious. We do most solemnly enjoin it on every man to partake of the Lord's supper, because it is every man's duty to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We do most unequivocally urge on all to become members of our churches, and to live in church fellowship, in the enjoyment of equal privileges, and the reciprocation of the same fraternities with the true Israel, because God, whose ambassadors we are, has said to such, "Wherefore,

come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing ; and I will receive you ; and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." He has commanded that we love his children, which if we do,—and our Saviour makes this the great test of being real disciples,—we shall seek and love communion with them, and hate estrangement from them. So far from wishing to go back to his former home and kindred ; so far from declining the offer of the church, and its great Head, and the Holy Spirit, as they one and all exclaim, "Come, and welcome," it is the bounden duty of every man to accept of the invitation, because it is his duty to exemplify the spirit and conduct, whilst expressing the words of Ruth—"Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge ; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

There are many duties in social and public life which answer to the one we are now considering ; duties which, though obligatory in themselves, yet require some prior duty to be discharged, some preparatory state or character to be attained. The same fact is observable in our common, holy, and blessed Christianity. Thus true faith in Christ presupposes repentance, and repentance conviction

of sin, and conviction of sin a knowledge of the law. In the affairs of common life this rule is indeed often violated, though not so frequently as in the professed Christian world. It is rare to find a man entering on any profession, or assuming some public office, without some qualification or other answerable to his behest. Such, however, is the obstinate self-complacency of man, his prevailing habit of diminishing his disqualifications, and heightening his own supposed high powers and acquirements, that there are but few who do not overrate their own abilities, virtues, and desert as members of society, to the prejudice of others. How necessary is it, therefore, for all to have recourse to every precaution ere they take the vows of the Lord upon them ; for who can accurately pourtray the shame, folly, and miseries attendant upon a vain, hollow profession ! What is a false professor but a hypocrite ; a walking falsehood ; a reproach to Christianity ; a burden, drawback, and scandal to the church ; an offence and a stumbling-stone to the little ones of Christ's flock ; the derision of the world, and the scoff of infernals ? It is very awful to make a jest of religion, and to insult and persecute Christ in his members ; it is, however, still more awful to profess his holy name, having a "lie in the right hand." Judas Iscariot is more injurious and a greater blasphemer than Saul the persecutor. The apostle, speaking of the

loud professing, the well and deep instructed, and wise and holy teaching Jews, declares, "For the name of God is blasphemed among the gentiles through you." Those who make a false, unscriptural profession will, most assuredly, one day repent as much, yea, and more, than those who have neglected their duty, and dishonoured their Saviour, by scrupulously hesitating to comply with his most express injunctions.

Christianity, unlike other religions, only employs moral compulsion. It is true, Christ sends his servants out into the "highways and hedges," with the order "Compel them to come in, that my house may be full." But no sooner is this mentioned by the evangelist, than our Saviour is heard delivering the following, which ought to be impressed as the most suitable reflection on the attention of each candidate who comes to him and his church, saying, "Give me admittance, Master; I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." The words are these, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish." It is a good wish, if rightly prompted, to desire to embrace, and to be embraced by one of the churches of Christ; it is

the most holy, honourable, and happy relation we can hold on earth, because one in which there is, or ought to be, least of the world and of the flesh, and because one more assimilated than any other to that which Christians will sustain for ever in heaven, when all others have perished and are forgotten. Let the candidate for church privileges, however, before he wears the insignia of profession, yea, and let every professor, old and young, and all Christian churches, remember these words that came from God himself, "For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good; but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."

We would, therefore, have all to profess, because we would invite all to possess those distinguishing principles that form and characterize "the highest style of man." We would spread out the sacramental table and offer its viands to all, exclaiming, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." But then we would also subjoin, "Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

And how are we to examine ourselves? What is required, in the first place, as an indispensable prerequisite, without which we have no right to the privilege? Or even had we a right, what is that without which we could have no proper taste or capacity for the spiritual exercise, any more than a sick man could have for a sumptuous feast, or a blind man be pleased or profited by our exposing colours before his eyes, brute instinct be instructed in philosophy, or deaf adders charmed by eloquence? Why, it is conversion; it is a new heart and a right spirit; a mind not only enlightened, but also directed and sanctified by spiritual wisdom and scriptural truth; a nature baptized in the laver of regeneration; that true repentance and faith which can wash the blackest robes, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. We are all by hereditary descent children of Satan, and are only known in heaven, and can only be distinguished, by the name of rebel, transgressor, and traitor. Ere, then, we have a new name, we must also have a new nature. "The carnal mind," says the apostle, "is enmity against God." Experience, observation, and history, alike teach us, that the whole bent of our mind is in direct opposition to the law and to the gospel, and there is no principle of recovery left in fallen man. From this naturally irreclaimable hostility, God alone can rescue us,—a fact which even reason and phi-

losophy will proclaim; for the effect cannot exceed its cause, nor the stream rise higher than the fountain, and holiness cannot grow out of sin, nor an originally bad tree in a bad soil produce good fruit. And scripture employs such language in reference to conversion,—which is in itself a term indeed more common to theologians than to the scriptures, in which the same great change which this term is designed to convey, is rather set forth under other expressions,—that we can entertain no doubt but that it is to be ascribed to God alone, and that it is a work to accomplish which divine power is absolutely indispensable. Such are the following, in which it is represented as a resurrection, a divine workmanship, a new birth, a new creation, which plainly and positively declare that it is no more in or of ourselves than our own creation or resurrection. Conversion is therefore a miracle of grace and of power, yea, the apostle speaks of it as evincing the same power in God as did the resurrection of Christ. Ephesians i. 19, 20. The Almighty, by the word of his power, can bring light out of darkness, but it is plainly impossible that darkness should produce light. It is only “the word of life,” spoken by the “Lord of life,” that can quicken and raise dead souls.

Let us, therefore, turn our thoughts to this important subject. We shall not, indeed, have space allowed us, whilst adhering to our design, to men-

tion more than the leading criteria, the primary attributes and broader features by which we are warranted to decide as to our spiritual estate. But we hope, however, to advance sufficient to direct honest inquirers, to alarm the presuming; whilst we encourage the desponding and strengthen the feeble believer. We had rather, however, be too strict than too lax, and hence we shall follow up what has been already partially anticipated, and mention, in the first place, the indeterminate and unsatisfactory, that we may better distinguish and make prominent, what are sure and satisfactory marks and evidences of true regeneration.

There are many persons who flatter themselves with hopes of being in a state of recovery from the bondage of spiritual corruption, infection, and putridity in which we are all born, and of restoration to God and God's nature,—for such is conversion,—who when seriously examined as to their hope, are almost like the man without the wedding-garment, when addressed by the lord of the feast. Many conclude themselves “in Christ” who have never deliberately and dispassionately weighed their credentials to the character of the “new creature,” which can alone avail to create us “in Christ” for even a single hour. Their hope hangs on nothing. They have not one valid reason to urge; the wish alone is father to the thought. Now in reference to such characters we can only say in passing, if

the brightest evidences are sometimes shaded with obscurities and doubts, if Christians who give so much time and effort, so much prayer and self-examination, to realize a clear title to the possession of the new birth, feel sometimes constrained to exclaim with Newton, †

“ ’Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought :
Do I love the Lord or no ?
Am I his ? Or am I not ? ”

If such be their experience, what pretension, not to say evidence, can they expose in favour of their presumption ? that they are Christians, or what is the same, converted characters ? “ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” Let not such hope to dream themselves into heaven, for it is not those who hope, but those alone who have experience answerable to this hope, that are “ fellow citizens of the saints, and of the household of faith.” But not to speak further of these fanatics, there are also many who have settled on some kind of evidence which seems promising, and yet that evidence is not sufficient to warrant their confidence. It will therefore be useful to point these out, not only as a preventive of error, but as aids to show the real nature and effects of true scriptural conversion. In order to prove our hope, and

convince ourselves that our testimonials are honourable, we must suffer, yea, we must invite, the rain, the floods, and the winds to beat upon its strongest bulwarks, for then only can we be scripturally and satisfactorily assured of its stability.

We have already shown that we can place no dependence whatever on mere profession, or the reception of Christian ordinances and sacraments. We may also add, that mere religious education, the strictest and wisest which the most pious parents can give, although it may make us good moralists in conduct, and great and scriptural theologians in creed, is, without divine influence, utterly unavailing to create and constitute us new creatures in Christ, for such "are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." We have often known and heard of the children of the most pious parents turning alike against their parents and their parents' God, and becoming as irreligious and depraved as their parents were godly. We have also known cases of real or assumed morality, the result of human teaching, and example, and education, which has falsified every hope of association with, much less derivation from, spiritual religion; and, according to scripture, nothing but this can afford any solid evidence of true conversion. And this leads me to go further, and observe that true scriptural conversion is neither a

mere physical, intellectual, or moral change, but a spiritual one. It is not a destruction of the man, nor yet of the old man, but the formation of the Christian. It improves, but never impairs; much less does it eradicate the original diversities of intellect, character, and temper. Conversion is often, indeed, described by many ignorant, as also by many well-informed persons, as a "becoming serious." Though this may be in some respect true, it is yet a rather suspicious phraseology. It would certainly be better to characterize the change by a man becoming rational; for our Saviour, as well as experience and observation, declare that the worldling is often far more serious in quest of earthly distinction and fortune than the Christian is in pursuit of that crown of glory that fadeth not away. Nor does conversion consist in the mere intellectual process of enlightenment. There are some men who, owing to educational disadvantages, or to neglect, or from never having entered at all into religious society, have continued almost as dark as heathens in reference to the truths of Christianity. These characters have perhaps accidentally come into close fellowship either with real or mere nominal Christians, who were not only acquainted, but also interested in religious truths, I mean as far as speculation, inquiry, and controversy are concerned, and they have hence been ushered into a new world, not

that however of saving conversion or experimental religion, but of speculative Christianity. Glaring errors have been corrected, new opinions imbibed, and a new science, namely, that of theology, with which they were formerly as unacquainted as an untaught child is with trigonometry, has been attentively studied, and its treasures appropriated by the memory and ruminated on by the intellect. Yea, it may be that their knowledge has had some influence on their temper and conduct as well as on their conversation, and hence they may appear both to themselves and others as converted characters. But though externally changed, there is no radical change in the heart. The lips and lives may publish to men what the heart refuses to declare to the heart-searching Jehovah ; there may be partial renovation, but it is not universal ; they may come very near to conversion, but not quite ; they are influenced by religion, but it is not that influence, that thorough regenerating and ever-sustained influence, which is associated with true conversion.

Akin to these are those characters who have seemingly become religious from religious associations. We all know the influence of example. But mere example can never change the heart. It may tend to meliorate the moral character, to soften somewhat of the natural obduracy, obstinacy, and enmity of the carnal mind towards God

and religion ; yea, it may serve, by a sort of reflection thrown upon the observer, to cast the aspect of conversion over the natural man. But no example, however apparently spiritually attractive, yea, no mere outward means, can avail to counteract and remove the native insensibility of the mind and heart of fallen man towards spiritual truths. They may go far, but they never will go far enough ; they will never enter and pass through the strait gate. The most powerful preaching, the richest cultivation of means, the most tender expostulations, the most persuasive reasoning, all the sparkling glories of eloquence, are only as the sounding brass and tinkling cymbal without divine influence. The grace and glory which shone on the face of Moses as he came down from the holy mount of divine communion, irradiated the countenance of the bystander, who might thus have been mistaken for the intimate of God. In the same way many who have been on terms of close and familiar friendship with those who live very near to God, may catch a heavenly smile which is but borrowed, and present appearances of conversion acquired, but not original. This is especially the case in reference to inferiors in rank, education, and talents, in those who are able to exercise powerful influence on their associates by reason of personal beauty, domestic ties, such as those of husband and wife, kind offices of friend-

ship or benevolence, or the charms of conversation and their native superiority of understanding. Such characters may thus catch the shadow from another without themselves possessing the substance of true evangelical religion ; they may learn by example but not by rule ; they may have the impress of piety, apparently genuine though really false, because an impress stamped by man and not by God. And what is of earth is and only can be earthly, and though it may speciously usurp the name, can never really attain to the character of the heavenly.

The two instances of false confidence we have now been mentioning are probably the most delusive, the most dangerous to detect of any of the pernicious, false refuges imbibed and fostered by men in the estimate they form of their religious condition. We have therefore placed them first. Let us proceed to the consideration of another, already, perhaps, partially anticipated in the preceding, but which, however, it will be desirable to distinguish separately. This is the possession of speculative knowledge, sound orthodoxy, and of shining and useful gifts. The possession of religious, scriptural knowledge is indeed absolutely indispensable to that of true personal religion. But though considerable theoretic information and understanding is thus required, it is equally certain that the greatest stores of merely intellec-

tual understanding may be wholly unassociated with piety. As the finest tree may be unproductive for want of the genial influences of heaven, so may the richest mind be "barren and unfruitful" in the "knowledge of God," because never leading to, much less abounding, in the experimental and practical virtues ever demanded from all of us by reason as by religion, from the relation subsisting between each man and his Creator, and his fellow men. Even true believers must own that their speculative far surpasses their practical and experimental Christianity. It will not be disputed, that Satan must be possessed of vast attainments of this nature, because he once stood before the throne of God, and was a gifted archangel. The apostle tells us he is often, in appearance, an angel of light, a fact which, considering the contrast, shows indirectly that he must be possessed of a mind as fully and familiarly acquainted with the whole circle of religious truth and experience, as an educated man is with the alphabet of his native tongue. In this respect all the divines that ever lived, not only taken individually, but collectively, when compared with him, are but tyros and children. Hence it will be seen that a change of opinion, although from the foulest errors to the purest scripture creed, can never alone constitute conversion. A man may pass through every school of theology, and only be further from the strait

gate than before his entrance on the first. As once stated by a faithful minister to a lady, who told him she was going to turn from the dissenters to the church, "Madam, you are turning from nothing to nothing." Yea, this kind of conversion, as we have just mentioned, so far from being an evidence of true conversion, has often afforded strong evidence to the contrary, as it has only added to that dogmatism, bigotry, pride, and worldliness, which are perhaps the most glaring characteristics of an unconverted state, as appears from the following declaration of our Saviour, when describing real conversion and its results, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." Dr. Doddridge, in his "Family Expositor," thus forcibly expresses himself on the subject: "Wisely did Christ silence the suspicious praises of an unclean spirit; and vain is all the hope which men build merely on those orthodox professions of the most important truths in which Satan himself could vie with them."* There is no doubt but that many unconverted characters are far more

* Mistake me not, I do not slight orthodoxy, nor jeer at the name; but only disclose the pretences of devilish zeal in pious, or seemingly pious men. The slanders of some of these, and the bitter, opprobrious speeches of others, have more effectually done the devil's service, under the name of orthodoxy and zeal for truth, than the malignant scorner of godliness.—*R. Baxter.*

orthodox in their creed, that they have both clearer and more comprehensive views of divine truth, can expatiate on them with greater liberty, can preach them with greater force, can give utterance to them in prayer with richer fervour, yea, excel in all but the intense inward feeling and acceptance and the outward exhibition of them, than many genuine Christians. Were not the limits we have prescribed ourselves to interdict, we might adduce a great number of examples of private Christians and of ministers, to corroborate the sentiments just advanced. Mr. Thomas Tregross had, according to his own account, known nothing of this most invaluable grace and distinction till he had been some years in the ministry, and had even suffered for conscience' sake as a nonconformist. The sermon which proved the means of his conversion was one composed and preached by himself. The late Robert Hall also dated his conversion after he had finished his preparatory studies for the ministry. And we might mention more who have most positively attested, that they enjoyed not the vitally transforming influences of regenerating grace until after they had been long and intimately acquainted, as well as sincerely ardent and zealous, as much about the great doctrines of the gospel as the minor subjects in religion, relating to church government and divine ordinances. The apostle also intimates the

same when he states, that we may possess every gift in brightest lustre, be masters of every tongue, be endowed with all knowledge, and even as courageous martyrs give our bodies to be burned, whilst yet destitute of true and saving grace. And the records of the church are not void of instances of men distinguished alike for knowledge, gifts, eminence in the church, and extensive usefulness, who have eventually proved themselves unconverted characters, and who lived and died without any solid appearance of having attained, by the Holy Ghost, any meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. We must not, therefore, confide in any powers and acquisitions of this nature. It is much to be feared that many encourage themselves, and are encouraged by others, to make a public profession of religion, yea, even to enter the sacred desk, on account of their gifts rather than their graces, though the former may be, and often is, the exhibition of mere nature, intellect, and imagination, oftentimes originating in the promptings of vanity and the love of publicity, yea, the very work of Satan.

Another frequent and fatal error, as to the proofs of conversion, is that arising from mere transient, partial, or counterfeit religious convictions.

It is true, indeed, that real conviction of sin is the production of the Holy Spirit. He convinceth

the true believer of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. But there are two classes who may be said to be convinced of sin without being converted, for we need not enter into any controversy as to the nature or the reality of the common and saving influences of the Holy Spirit, for the passage just referred to does not render it necessary on the present subject, as we think none will regard its import to be such as to contravene what we have just stated. The two classes referred to are those who have first, common ; and secondly, extraordinary religious convictions. In consequence of these impressions and feelings, they are ensnared into a full confidence of their conversion, without attending to other considerations. There is a sight and sense of sin, not only of the general depravity of human nature, but of individual sinfulness, which is a mere loose notion, rather than strong principle and feeling combined. It floats on the surface, but does not sink into a broken, contrite, and repenting heart. It is neither sufficiently deep nor extensive to constitute true conversion. It is a notional, rather than experimental and practical principle. Confession alone, though sincere, does not prove that conviction of sin which ever accompanies regeneration. A languid assent to any truth is very different from a strong prevailing persuasion and feeling sensibility of its reality and importance. Were you to be intro-

duced to a stranger, you would adjudge him to be a sinner because he is a man. The mere conviction of this fact, however, would not lead you to severity of disapprobation ; you would not shudder at his depravity, and seek to estrange yourself from any familiarity, or guard yourself from any contamination with such an offender. But suppose you are further informed, on certain authority, in general terms, that he is an immoral character, a drunkard, thief, and debauchee. Would not your thoughts and feelings be changed? Would you not be struck, yea shocked, with the badness of a character, which but for this would never have perhaps been the subject of your meditation? Suppose, further, that all the minute and hateful circumstances of his conduct are related, that all the aggravations of his misdoings and omissions are freely and fully opened before you, how his lips roll with frothy folly and gross obscenities, oaths, and curses; how he illtreats his wife, neglects his family, and injures his neighbours, derides all virtue, and encourages the most vicious, would not your detestation be greatly augmented by such recital? Suppose, further, that his heart was laid bare, all his vain, proud, unclean, malicious thoughts, all those sins that never saw the light for want of opportunity, the fruit of which would have been murders, adulteries, blasphemies, and thefts innumerable. Suppose you could visit

those dark recesses with a powerful, all-penetrating light, would you not then recoil from him as from a serpent, and wish that society could be freed from his pestilential breath? Does not the reader perceive, to apply the illustration to our subject, that there is a wide difference between bare assent to the general proposition that he is a sinner, and a full, impartial insight into his corruptions. There is a great difference between a mere knowledge of one's sinfulness whilst the mind is devoted to other subjects, and the being swallowed up in the thought and feeling of that sinfulness, searching out its aggravations, and abhorring its disclosures. There is much the same difference as exists between the mere expression of sympathy with the sufferings of some distant strangers, and sympathy expressed and felt toward a beloved relation, whose sufferings come palpably before your daily observation. But true repentance, however, which is a part of true conversion, is something more than understanding, or even feeling sensible of our sinfulness. There is sorrow, conviction, self-loathing, and reformation; the knowledge and the feeling are alike influential, not only for a time, but perpetually; not only in the particular, but the universal.

There is another species of experience far more promising than that we have just considered, which is that of strong and violent convictions of sin, often

apparently similar to those felt in regeneration. Not only so, but regeneration often commences with these convictions ; but then, when such is the origin of conversion, these convictions, which are often alarming and terrible, are always followed by others of a less equivocal character, leading from Moses to Christ, and from fear to love, and thus to evangelical holiness and Christian consistency. There is sorrow, yea, excessive sorrow, but it is not of a godly sort ; resolutions are formed, and perhaps followed out, but they are not founded on right principles ; there is a slavish, but no filial fear of offending God ; a legal, but not an evangelical repentance. The Romanists distinguish these under the names of attrition and contrition, intending by the former, that compunction of conscience and grief of heart which arises from the dread of punishment, and by the latter, that which we style evangelical sorrow for sin, which arises from a desire to please God. The former calmness of the false penitent, thus painfully alive to his sin, was nothing but ignorance or insensibility, as his seeming conversion is only the result, not of grace working in the heart, but that of a criminal standing before his judge, or a rebellious subject trembling beneath the frown of his sovereign ; a feeling which may, indeed, form a prominent part in true conversion, but which can never constitute the whole. It is God revealing himself, not in his

Son, but by his law ; and what else can we expect than that the culprit man, made conscious of his exposure to the justice and vengeance of a holy and an all-powerful God, should feel and act like Adam, who no sooner heard the voice of God, though in the cool of the evening, than he hid himself ; or the Israelites, who, terrified by the preternatural signs and wonders attending the giving of the law, exclaim, “ We shall die, for we have seen God.” A deep and dreadful consciousness of his own sin and desert of punishment, the deformity of sin and the beauty of virtue, a quick, an enlightened, and loud speaking, thunder-roaring conscience,—these will be felt by lost spirits, and make “ that worm that never dies.” There is a conviction of sin brought on by powerful preaching, awe-striking and affecting providences, especially by the approach of death, which often wears a most flattering aspect, and seems to betoken true conversion. But that no dependence is to be placed upon such is evident from those who have been spared the bitterness of death, but who were no sooner restored to health than their convictions disappeared, their resolutions were broken, their wisdom was turned into folly, and their former goodness proved “ as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away.” A pious clergyman of the church of England, who kept a record of all his visits to the sick, has recorded this fact, that out of two

thousand whom he had visited in the course of forty years that recovered, only two proved to be sincere. Though all the rest presented the most flattering evidence of true repentance, yet those two alone, out of two thousand, proved to have been the subjects of that "godly sorrow that worketh repentance unto life." It is not right, therefore, to establish any thing certain from any mere convictions and distress of mind in reference to religion. It is not the large draught of wormwood and gall, but the eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus, that constitutes the true believer. The depth and duration of such afflictive experience are but circumstantial, and do not enter into the essence of the character. The decisive point turns not on the depth or the length of such feelings, but on how they have *terminated*. By this only can we scripturally ascertain whether these convictions originate in excited passions, or whether they are the effect of divine influence. It is not the degree or duration of the grief, but the great question is, whether it be of a godly sort, leading to repentance, faith, and sanctification. Such may be the commencement of religion, the first brooding of the Spirit, but we can only decide on the reality of regeneration by the reality of conversion, which is the subsequent history of regeneration, the former being understood by divines, and appropriately distinguished as the work

of God considered in and by itself alone, and the latter as the effects and practical results of divine operation. The former is thus to be regarded as a new workmanship, a spiritual resurrection, the latter as the exercise and exhibition of those new principles and affections which constitute regeneration.*

Another unsatisfactory evidence adduced by

* Regeneration is a spiritual change; conversion is a spiritual motion. In regeneration, a power is conferred; conversion is the exercise of that power. In regeneration there is given us a principle to turn; conversion is our actual turning. Hence that conversion is related to regeneration, as the effect is to the cause. In the covenant, the new heart, the new spirit, and God's putting his Spirit into them, is distinguished from their walking in his statutes. In regeneration, man is passive; but in conversion, he is active. The first reviving us is wholly the act of God, without any concurrence of the creature; but after we are revived, we do actively and voluntarily live in his sight. He will revive us, he will raise us up, and then we shall live in his sight, then we shall walk before him, then shall we follow on to know the Lord. Regeneration is the motion of God in the creature; conversion is the motion of the creature to God, by virtue of the first principle. From this principle all acts of believing, repenting, mortifying, quickening, do spring. In all these a man is active; in the other, merely passive. All these are acts of the will, by the assisting grace of God, after the infusion of the first grace. Conversion is a giving ourselves to the Lord; this is a voluntary act; but the power is wholly and purely from the Lord himself. A renewed man is led by the Spirit of God, not dragged, not forced. The Spirit leads as a father doth a child by the hand.—*Charnock, folio edit.*, vol. ii., p. 70.

many as proof of their conversion is that derived from the renunciation of some particular sin, an improved moral practice, and a course of self-denial.

Real conversion respects the heart as well as the conduct, and is described in scripture as a new life to God rather than as a death to sin ; and is, we think, better distinguishable by the former than the latter. Sin is indeed dethroned, but not destroyed ; it is weakened, but it is still strong, and often violent ; the passions sometimes raging like the stormy sea, and would continue to do so as with those who are ever "like the troubled sea," did not Jesus constantly come to whisper, "Peace, be still." It is, however, impossible for a true Christian to sin either in the same spirit or degree as those whose fetters have never been burst by divine power and grace. We state this here to encourage the weak and trembling, but true believers ; and shall again resume the same topic when we proceed to encourage the timid disciple to avow his attachment to his Lord. It is necessary to be careful, whilst we discountenance false hopes, not to discourage "the bruised reed and smoking flax."

Many presume on the safety and goodness of their spiritual state solely in consequence of a mere outward change, and this appears the more flattering in proportion to the greatness and extent of the reformation. This is even the case when

but one darling lust, once rampant, is suppressed, especially when effected by religious influences such as the admonitions and instructions of an arousing ministry. The man who, once bound in the worst of chains, by those lips which he has rendered even parched by an acquired extravagant indulgence, not only withdraws from, but actually abhors companionship with men "who are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink." The thief has resolved "to steal no more," the covetous to imitate the liberality of Zaccheus, the debauchee to abstain from "chambering and wantonness," and the light and trifling learn to look thoughtfully, and converse alone on serious discourse ; and these, by virtue of resolutions good and commendable, indeed, which they have triumphantly maintained, and in some instances by barely commuting one duty for another, are induced to conclude that this is the work of the Spirit, and the conversion of the scriptures. Many unwisely, as the apostle says, compare themselves with others, like the pharisee in the temple, and, with him, believe themselves to be what they are not, but what those poor publicans whom they despise often are. Now scripture conversion is all this reformation, and much more. There is that inward repentance which consists in a "broken and contrite heart ;" there is a daily believing, and therefore sanctifying confidence in Jesus, be-

cause his blood cleanseth from all sin ;" there are motions and affections of an evangelical nature ; there is not only the particular, but the general destruction of the reigning power of sin, and a good life becomes a fair and noble edifice, erected upon the atonement, every good work being performed by him who has become in truth a Christian man, being "renewed in the spirit of his mind," with the cross in his hand, declaring in the spirit of the words of Constantine, "By this alone I conquer." The following language of the apostle describes both the faith and holiness possessed by the true Christian, who will therefore be able experimentally and practically to declare, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

We shall not detain the reader longer on this part of the subject. There is another source of illusion, to which we can only just allude, having already mentioned it in a previous chapter, but which from its importance we cannot pass over ; and that is, those assumed conversions which may be traced to the mere influence of exhortation and example, and the promptings of duty, respect, gratitude, and affection towards ministers, relations, and superiors. We could not furnish a better illustration of real and seeming conversion,

as either instrumentally wrought by or else associated with the ties of affection and the claims of duty, than that furnished in the first chapter of the book of Ruth. Orpah and Ruth appeared for a time equally desirous and determined to follow Naomi, until the sacred writer thus parts them, finely showing the distinction between mere affection and affection combined with real religion: "And they lifted up their voice and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her." Conversion commences indeed often thus instrumentally, as it was probably in the case of this Moabitess widow; but when so, it leads the true converts not only to follow in external profession, not only to say, "Thy people shall be my people," but also "thy God shall be my God." Where religion appears to have been thus implanted there should be the closer examination, and the greater care and anxiety to test its reality on a scripture foundation. Hypocrisy is hidden in many cases from all but God himself. We have even known cases where parties have believed themselves religious characters, and have joined a church, where their self-deception has originated in worldly views and sinister intentions. So great is the treachery which the human heart can pass upon the understanding.

In order to defend the reader from delusion, we have mentioned these, which are but a few of the

insidious errors, suggested by inquiries, respecting the validity of this great change. It may be that our book shall fall into the hands of some who falsely conclude their evidences solid, as of others who dare not say peace to themselves, though scripture would warrant their assurance. Let not any, though esteemed as sincere Christians, repose any confidence on such false props ; but seek, without intermission, by the instruction and grace of God, to find and to form within themselves that new man which is created in the naturally depraved uncongenial soul of man, in righteousness and true holiness. To aid them in their solemn investigation by determining on the unquestionable evidences of real scriptural conversion, shall now be our immediate concern.

CHAPTER IV.

NATURE AND EVIDENCES OF TRUE CONVERSION.

WE have in the previous chapter pointed out some of the principal errors entertained by men in judging of their spiritual estate. We have thus served, by showing what it is not, to make manifest what it really is, and shall not therefore detain the reader long on those direct and decisive criteria which scripture presents to our examination. The sacred page is literally studded with passages by which we may learn to discover our real character. Its examples, its precepts, its representations, and its unequivocal declarations, may alike teach us to distinguish the peculiar attributes of that great change, of which no less a power than that of the third person in the Trinity is the agent. We can but dwell on the more prominent features, but these will be sufficient, if the reader peruses our page with consideration, to enable him to know whether he is a stranger to the second birth.

The expression to which we have just referred,

of a new birth, is evidently of the same similarity and force with a multitude of others, all of which go to prove that conversion is a thorough change, a new nature, a moral revolution in the experience and history of each truly converted character. Thus it is variously described as being born of the Spirit, as a resurrection and a new creation, as being quickened, as becoming sons of God, as being renewed in the spirit of the mind, as a translation from the kingdom of Satan to that of God, as a transition similar to that of the natural night into day, as the eradication of a heart of stone and the implantation of the heart of flesh, as the putting off the old man and putting on the new man, as an immersion of the impure, because earth and sin-born, soul in the laver of divine, regenerating influence. From these descriptions it is evident that conversion is both a great and universal change, and however some persons may attempt to explain the force of such passages away, as even some learned divines, such as Paley, have done, by referring these, and similar strong metaphors and plain statements, to the change from idolatry to Christianity, from viciousness to virtue, or from gross ignorance and thoughtlessness common to many styling themselves Christians, to real religion, it is certain that scripture makes no exception, expressly declaring that these terms may be justly applied to denote the conversion of both the

most moral and the most flagitious. What can be plainer than these words of our Lord : "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven?" Although dark to Nicodemus, the metaphor here used is both plain and emphatic, especially when considered in connexion with the whole dialogue of Christ with this master of Israel. In our natural birth we resemble, though not perfectly, our parents ; we are placed under their protection, tuition, guidance, and feel and cultivate towards them filial dispositions ; we possess all the lineaments and powers of human nature, small and feeble at first, but ever growing to maturity. Like the bird bursting its prison shell, we enter a new world, become conversant with new objects, discover new powers, and rise from a sort of vegetative life to the dignity of human nature and an introduction into human society. In like manner in the spiritual birth we are made as certainly, though not equally with Adam, in the likeness of God ; we are endowed with piety ; we do not, like our first parents, enter into existence in the full grown perfection of manhood, but as "new born babes," destined to grow and improve ; and whereas we once had no existence, or, if existing, had lain breathless in darkness and confinement, we commence our career of spiritual existence, we enter a new state, we find the light of God's countenance sweet to the eye, we crave new nourish-

ment, even the milk of the word, and whereas we were once as good as dead, we become alive to God and religion, and ever continue to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour," until we attain to the "full stature of men in Christ Jesus."

The moral change, therefore, effected at regeneration is great, entire, and universal ; a spiritual change equally great with those of a natural kind performed by Christ on the diseased and the dying, who from physical helplessness, and privation, and exilement from society, were restored to health and strength, and the pursuits and enjoyments of life. Were not this the fact, the terms employed to denote it in scripture would only be splendid words full of equivocation and deceit. It is in every instance no less a change than the transformation of a careless, insensible, stubborn, self-righteous, proud, and deceitful heart, to one considerate, tender-hearted, humble, and dutiful. As the word conversion literally signifies, it is to turn and to be turned ; to turn from sin and the world, and to have not only the face, but the heart turned towards God and religion. It reverses a man's position ; his thoughts and his affections, his plans, his efforts, are now diverted from those objects which formerly had engrossed his whole concern, and directed towards those which he had either treated with hostility or prac-

tical contempt. He had been living in a perpetual state of revolt and alienation from God ; he now returns, like the prodigal, in the exercise of genuine repentance and filial reverence and affection. The "strong man armed" is disarmed by one "stronger than he," and compelled to relinquish the habitation when he now has no more ability than he formerly had right to retain. His views of sin are effectually and permanently changed. He regarded it as a light, excusable evil unless it broke out into gross immoralities. He could once commit it with comparative indifference, without making a believing application to God for forgiving mercy and restoring grace through Christ, but he now exclaims, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." He was formerly only restrained at best from sin by the slavery of fear, but he is now preserved in the paths of obedience by the dutifulness of love. The promises and the exceeding grace of God in human redemption, render sin in his estimation more bitter, odious, and fearful than his direct threatenings and terrors. He once entertained, perhaps, high views of himself ; he could extenuate his worst conduct, as also overrate the virtue of his best performances ; but he now both discovers and feels himself to be a guilty, depraved being, his heart far worse than his life, and both to be infinitely deeper dyed in depravity than he sees or

believes them to be. He feels himself destitute of all goodness, that he deserves to perish, and that he can have no hope of absolution but in the free mercy of God through Christ, nor of recovery but by divine influence and gracious assistance. The pleasures of sin are exchanged for the pleasures of religion ; the service of God he finds to be a rich reward ; the sabbath, once a weariness, is a delight ; and the word of God, once insipid, is a feast to his soul ; and the dissipations of the world are gladly exchanged for the society of the righteous, and the new sacred avocations and festivities which his new religion so abundantly provides. Yea, so far from sin yielding him delight, he now abhors it, and declares it to be that abominable thing his soul hateth. The sorrow of the world, working death, is exchanged for that penitential sorrow that worketh repentance unto life. Like Mary, he weeps for nought but sin, and after none but Jesus. To be delivered from sin is his chief desire, as his subjection to sin is the chief burden and misery of his soul. Though more constantly and awfully sinning in his unregenerate state, he was yet secure, or, if alarmed, he despised the means of pardon, and struggled against the remonstrances of his conscience ; but now he perceives the necessary, inevitable connexion between sin and endless perdition, the irretrievable ruin to which the impenitent, reckless sinner is rushing, and thus he

feels the preciousness of a Saviour his only refuge from the wrath to come, and cries to him, "Lord, save me, or I perish." And he not only fears the penal, but also dreads the polluting consequences of sin, which leads him to cry, "Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean." "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Thus his principal anxiety is directed towards the salvation of his soul, which he feels becomes increasingly hopeful proportionably to his deliverance from the thralldom of sin. Thus conversion principally, and indeed in its strict sense, is wholly concerned about sin, so that the man truly regenerated, so far from indulging his depraved dispositions or reviewing past sin with satisfaction, or even indifference, actually mourns with pious sorrow over sin that has been both pardoned and subdued, regarding each sin as a causeless, unwarranted affront against infinite Majesty, as the basest ingratitude to the greatest Benefactor, as the cruel sword that smote the good shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep, and as the extreme degradation, insane folly, and ruin of a rational, moral, and immortal creature. Hence every one that is adopted into God's family will be sure to feel and display a prevailing love of holiness and distaste for sin, apart from its consequences. The new man, the apostle declares, is created in righteousness and true holiness. And

as love to God and obedience to his commands,—which the apostle John declares the greatest and the only perfectly satisfactory evidence of the existence of that love—are the primary attributes of holiness, as many as have received Him, to whom he has granted power to become the sons of God; will feel towards God the spirit of children, a disposition to love, serve, trust, and glorify him. Hence, instead of being influenced to shun vice or practice virtue from mere maxims of fleshly wisdom or motives of worldly policy, as before conversion, their morality will become evangelical, the morality of the heart, as well as that of the life; the obedience of self-renouncing faith performed in the name of Jesus Christ and for the honour of God. A good tree must produce good fruit. A holy life, proceeding from a holy heart, is the greatest and best confirmation of a regenerate state. “We know,” says St. John, “that every one that doeth righteousness is born of God;” and again, “He that is begotten of God keepeth himself; and that wicked one toucheth him not.” “Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, but he that committeth sin,” that is, habitually and willingly, “is of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin,” deliberately and wilfully, “because he is born of God.” From these words of inspiration

it is certain that this constitutes the most clear and certain evidence, and in fact it includes all the other signs of regeneration, to which we shall now proceed to direct your attention, earnestly requesting the reader to follow us with that self-application, without which the best efforts of written or vocal instruction must prove ineffectual to the least good.

Sincere and universal love, esteem, and respect towards those who give proof of being truly Christians is an invariable and a necessary characteristic of the possession of real Christianity in ourselves. There will be a preference felt and shown to their character, society, and interests, as Christians. It is styled brotherly love. We love a brother not only on account of his moral excellencies, but because he is our brother ; and though we may have our partialities, yet this principle and feeling, if heartfelt in its breathings and heavenly in its origin, will overstep differences of creed and name, imperfections of conduct, and irregularities of temper, manifesting itself, though not with equal degree, towards the least holy, lovely, amiable, and intelligent of God's heaven-born and heaven-bound family on earth. "We know," says St. John, "that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren : he that loveth not his brother abideth in death." We all have our sectarian preferences and peculiarities, but a settled

spirit of bigotry is a decided contradiction to any professor's personal Christianity. Let a man be in every other respect a saint, a champion, an apostle, and an evangelist, and give all his goods to the poor, and, finally, his body to be burned for the defence and extension of pure Christianity, yet destitute of this spirit, and omitting that course of conduct to which it infallibly conducts, he is most certainly a stranger to the grace of God in his heart ; for "he that loveth not, knoweth not God ; for God is love : and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him."

Another sure and necessary characteristic of the true Christian is habitual spirituality of mind in contradistinction to worldliness of disposition and character. In his unrenewed state man is under the dominion of the world, solely guided and governed by its false, imperfect morality, its prejudices, and its partialities. The pleasures of the world are his only happiness, its smiles his only honour, its riches his only inheritance and treasure, its frowns his only terror ; but when converted his experience becomes that of the apostle : " God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Instead of saying, " Who will show us any good " in the world ? he now exclaims with the psalmist, " In thy

favour is life ;" " Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me." Not that they are indifferent to their position and prospects in the world, but that the affections, once chained to earth, are now set on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." The apostle says, " They that are after the flesh " (unregenerate) " do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit do mind " (or set their minds on) " the things of the Spirit." To love the present evil world is a fatal token of an unrenewed mind ; for he that " loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him." " Every one that is born of God overcometh the world : and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." He has such views of eternal realities, and feels so intensely and influentially " the powers of the world to come," that the superior claims and attractions of the one throw into shade and invest with littleness the honours, riches, and pleasures of earth ; and all the temptations to the rejection or neglect of the claims of Christ and his commands which may arise to him as a member of human society, are thus successfully combated, and he is constrained, in spite of opposition, to persevere in that wise and happy race which his Saviour has set before him. He welcomes the cross that he might win the crown. Another characteristic of the true Christian is the prevailing habit and spirit

of devotion. Whatever may be mistaken for prayer, no man in his natural state can present one single spiritual prayer to God. As breath is a proof of natural life, so prayer is a proof of spiritual life, for no dead soul can pray. No man can be a Christian who does not daily pray to God with the heart in secret, and we believe no man can pray sincerely, fervently, and constantly who is not a real Christian.

Such, in short, are some of the principal features of the real Christian. He is a believer in Jesus Christ; he receives him humbly and penitentially, but confidentially and cordially, as his own most precious, admired, and beloved Saviour, and proves that he has received him by "walking in Him," and by "taking up his cross and following Him." Love and obedience to God and charity towards all mankind, are with him both a disposition and habit. There is no command, however unfashionable, painful, or perilous its performance, but that he wishes and labours to observe; and no sin, though useful as a right hand or pleasing as a right eye, from which he does not sincerely and strenuously endeavour to abstain. Not, however, that sin is perfectly mortified, for, as before stated, grace does not so much consist, in its first degrees, in an actual, complete mastery over sin as in an unfeigned and settled purpose of heart to leave every sin, with a steady progress towards the

attainment of that desire. These holy resolutions against sin and after the pursuit and practice of true religion, argue grace in the heart, although they are not strictly complied with, as exemplified in the psalmist in these words: "I have purposed and will not transgress thy law: I have sworn, and will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments." It demonstrates the work of the Spirit when a soul doth "cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart." A disposition and desire to engage in truly religious conversation, as instanced in the author of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and especially to hold commune with eminent and experienced Christians; to be employed in disseminating the truths of religion and offices of general religious usefulness; delight in ordinances; a desire and relish for truly religious publications; desires after grace, joined with honest endeavours, however feeble;* general seriousness of temper, conversation, and conduct, as opposed to levity

* The apostle joins desire and zeal together, see 2 Cor. vii. 11 and viii. 11. God will not accept the will for the deed unless we endeavour to perform that of which we professedly approve. There may be some sort of desires in respect to religion, both weak and worthless as those of the slothful man described by the wise man: "The desires of the slothful kill him, because his hands refuse to labour." Bernard portrays the same, spiritually, to the life: "Carnal men love to obtain, but love not to follow Christ; they will not endeavour to seek him whom they desire to find."

and trifling ; watchfulness against temptation, and diligent reading of the scriptures, are all cheering tokens of true personal piety. The apostle Peter says, " As new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." There is in the child, as soon as it is born, a natural, instinctive craving after the mother's breast. In like manner, every man spiritually new born will earnestly desire the word of truth and the means of grace.

We have professedly addressed our work to the hopeful but non-professing hearer of the gospel. These are the hope of the church and the ministry, who continue to turn towards them the gaze of eager attention and anxiety. The reception which the preaching of the gospel finds, is made by our Lord the great test of character. Apart from this, it is certain that the entrance of the word alone giveth light and life, made effectual by the operation of the Holy Spirit, who thus commences and carries on to perfection his great and 'good workmanship in the heart of sinful, apostate man. Each of our readers may see his character drawn with unerring accuracy by him who is to be his judge, in the parable of the sower ; and, as a final test, we would urge him therefore to examine himself by the explanation given by our Lord of the different classes of hearers there specified. He cannot institute a closer and more faithful scrutiny

of his spiritual state. There are various classes of hearers who give no promise, but the reverse. Of these are *ignorant* hearers, who, though they constantly have the oracles of God clearly and fully expounded, are not the least instructed by what they hear. *Inattentive* hearers, who, though they may regularly attend on the word, and never betray themselves by a listless attitude, are only influenced to do so for the sake of appearances, from the force of habit and education, or to wile away time. *Self-righteous, whole-hearted* hearers, who believe themselves too wise to be further instructed, and sufficiently good to dispense with further improvement. *Worldly* hearers, whose every good impression and resolution is soon choked by mammon, the present evil world being almost equally supreme in their regard during the sermon and throughout divine service and the sabbath, as in the week. *General* hearers, who scarcely ever hear for themselves, but apply each sentence to their neighbours. *Criticising* hearers, who, like the former, never think of self-application, but only consider and examine the orthodoxy, the style and gesture, or even the person of the preacher; and, finally, *idle* hearers, who either forget the next hour what they have heard, or else treat it with practical supineness and indifference. Another class, if such they may be styled, for they may be said to come under the last named, are

believes them to be all goodness, that he he can have no hope mercy of God through by divine influence all pleasures of sin are exchanged for the service of religion ; the service of ward ; the sabbath, or and the word of God, soul ; and the dissipation exchanged for the society now sacred avocations of new religion so abundant from sin yielding him deliverance and declares it to be that which hateth. The sorrow of this is exchanged for that which worketh repentance unto weeps for nought but Jesus. To be delivered from as his subjection to sin is misery of his soul. That awfully sinning in his un yet secure, or, if alarmed, of pardon, and struggled at of his conscience ; but now sary, inevitable connexion of perdition, the irretrievable penitent, reckless sinner is

OF TRUE CONVERSION.

supplications as well as the discourses of ministers of Christ; they are both constant, serious, and attentive in their attendance most lucid and faithful expositions of scriptures, and when retiring from the sanctuary seem impressed, they muse and converse, the speaker, but on his all-important theme contribute, perhaps liberally, to the support of religion; they rejoice at each visit they make to the minister; they will frequent the place of meeting; they evidence an interest in the progress of Christ's cause, and associate almost exclusively with professors. Are we not justified in proceeding such to be hopeful hearers? Has not church reason to demand of them, "Why are you not one with us as you fully appear to be one?" You are brethren, and why not therefore as Christ has commanded, and reside in the same Christian tabernacle, and own yourself a brother and a sister in the Lord? To us you give strong evidences of being renewed in the spirit of your minds, of having received the inward as well as the external call; but as we cannot penetrate into your hearts, of whose secrets yourselves must be conscious, placing directly before your attention the scriptural characteristics of the "new man," we bid you to examine yourselves, and determine whether or not you are "gathered unto Christ," or else "scattering abroad." Are you

those who, belonging strictly speaking to none of the former, hear with attention and often with interest, and are convinced of the truth of pulpit instructions, and are somewhat affected thereby, and yet remain unconverted. Alas, how many are there in this deplorable, awful state! When Mr. Whitfield was preaching on one occasion for Mr. Grimshaw, after animadverting in severe language on false professors, he stated that under such a ministry as they enjoyed, he encouraged himself to believe that they produced fruits answerable to their privileges. On which the minister, not able to contain himself at such an announcement, although proceeding from so estimable a preacher, rising from his seat, thus interrupted him, with the full power of his voice: "O sir! for God's sake do not speak so: I pray you do not flatter them: I fear the greater part of them are going to hell with their eyes open." Should unprofitable hearers be reading our pages, we would urge them to reflect on the increased responsibility incurred by every returning sabbath. Each faithful sermon will be a "swift witness" to arraign thee, and bring down fearful punishment on thy guilty head before the tribunal of Jehovah, shouldest thou thus continue unchanged and undecided for God. But there are hearers who do something more than hear, they appear to be "doers of the word." They seem to listen with heartfelt attention to the public

supplications as well as the discourses of the ministers of Christ ; they are both constant, and serious, and attentive in their attendance on the most lucid and faithful expositions of scripture truths, and when retiring from the sanctuary, they seem impressed, they muse and converse, not on the speaker, but on his all-important theme ; they contribute, perhaps liberally, to the support of religion ; they rejoice at each visit they receive from the minister ; they will frequent the prayer-meeting ; they evidence an interest in the prosperity of Christ's cause, and associate almost exclusively with professors. Are we not justified in proclaiming such to be hopeful hearers ? Has not the church reason to demand of them, " Why are you not one *with* us as you fully appear to be one *of* us ? " You are brethren, and why not therefore do as Christ has commanded, and reside in the same Christian tabernacle, and own yourself a brother and a sister in the Lord ? To us you give strong evidences of being renewed in the spirit of your minds, of having received the inward as well as the external call ; but as we cannot penetrate into your hearts, of whose secrets yourselves must be conscious, placing directly before your attention the scriptural characteristics of the " new man," we bid you to examine yourselves, and determine whether or not you are " gathering with Christ," or else " scattering abroad." Are you re-

nouncing the delusions of self-righteousness and self-confidence, and trusting and rejoicing in Christ Jesus as *your* Saviour, the scriptures as your directory, and to heavenly influences for perseverance and progress in religion? Have you a supreme love to God, and a supreme regard for religion? Are you possessed of spirituality of mind such as would enable you to unite with heart-felt pleasure in the exercises of the unseen world of glory? Is secret prayer your daily habit? Are you desirous, truly and constantly desirous, and labouring after spiritual rather than secular blessings? and does the heart prompt you to that obedience which is the life of heaven? Do you find delight in the society of God's people? Are you recovered from that natural enmity to God and to godliness, and from that sinful and most unwise indifference to His will and to His favours, which we all feel till we are changed by God's power and grace from natural to spiritual, from earthly to heavenly, and from walking by sight to walking by faith? and can you think, and do you frequently think, on a holy heaven as your future home? We do not inquire whether you possess these in perfection, as this is needless, but do you possess them in part? Have you any measure of those feelings and principles, and do you pursue that course of conduct which are the natural and necessary results and tokens of true religion in the soul? Such is the

turning-point on which the duty of a public profession of Christianity is suspended. Are we, or are we not, really converted characters? or are we truly Christians?

The result of this examination must be one or other of these two conclusions. Whilst following up these inquiries, the reader may discover that he has no good evidence whatever on which to ground a hope of his conversion; or if any evidence may present itself, it may be so doubtful as rather to perplex than satisfy. And to such, therefore, it becomes our duty to urge them to seek, or as scripture has it, "to make to themselves a new heart." "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Without this change we cannot enter heaven; nor shall we, if death thus overtakes us, have throughout eternity any more hope than a fallen angel either of gaining celestial bliss, or of escaping the damnation of hell. Our Saviour plainly and positively declares, "Except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." All such, therefore, we bid what Christ himself enjoins in these words: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." And the way in which they are to seek that inestimable blessing, by which they shall obtain repentance and renewal of heart, is by prayer,—earnest and frequent prayer. This is the great, the only resource, of those who feel painfully anxious about

their spiritual safety. And in so doing, sincerely and repeatedly, when all other means fail, this shall prove successful; for our Saviour has promised that more than the most affectionate parent is certain not to deny the urgent suit of his children when seeking good things absolutely necessary, which he can easily supply, will God be sure to "give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Prayer, however, must be united with the diligent, dutiful use of means. You must break off habits of carelessness and sin, and cherish those habits to the best of your ability, however small, or often overpowered by temptation, and pursue that course in which the God of grace is wont to meet with unpardoned, unholy sinners, and grant them his indwelling Spirit, who shall effect this great moral change, and never finally leave them, but be ever preparing them for that vast and unchangeable eternity which must very soon swallow up the fleeting, insignificant present, like a noxious dram of water cast into the pure immensity of the ocean.

But there will be others who, upon such inquiries, will come to an opposite conclusion. They find, to their unspeakable satisfaction, that there is prevailing evidence in favour of their being partakers of this most valuable blessing, this highest evidence of the divine goodness. The understanding has been enlightened; they have been convinced of the depravity of human nature, of their

particular sinfulness and absolute, entire dependence on the Lamb of God ; that the corrupt and perverse will has been renovated, the affections, once wholly carnal, become spiritual, and their conduct changed from a course of undisguised ungodliness or worldliness, to scripture holiness. Such characters there are too thickly scattered throughout our churches, who, though belonging to the flock, never enter the fold of Christ, some of whom have equal, and even greater, confidence in their personal Christianity, which is never suspected by their religious acquaintances, than many of those who have long since professed his name. Others, who give not such shining evidences, would yet be received almost without a scruple by even strict churches ; and many more, who may be almost said to waste the sweet odour and sacred influence of their religion in unobserved and unknown seclusion, afraid and ashamed of themselves, as the Christian church is of them, if they would but come forward, as Christ commands, would become both ornaments and supporters of the cause of their Prince Immanuel, would feel a sweet assurance, hope, and confidence they have never yet attained, and thus become themselves, and, so far as their influence extends, make others also, more holy, vigorous, useful, and happy. In some cases it is to be suspected that this ungainly attitude in which such disciples stand towards

their Saviour and Sovereign, and towards his church and cause, is the result principally of inadvertence, neglect of inquiry and consideration. In others more enlightened, it either arises from false reasons, which to themselves justify their own highly reprehensible conduct, or else from a very, very low state of piety. Some there may be who have inward struggles on the subject, and are almost ready, and sometimes quite resolved, to come out from their secret resting-places. All these we shall, we think, separately address, and urge forward to their common duty, whilst we point out, in the first place, the false pleas usually alleged in defence or excuse of such unchristian procedure ; and, secondly, the direct, unanswerable scripture warrants which concur to establish both the duty and desirableness of the profession of Christianity, and of acknowledged union with that body of the Christian church with whom they find the closest sympathy in sentiment.

CHAPTER V.

DOUBTFUL EVIDENCES OF CONVERSION.

THE subject of our special consideration in our last chapter was the signs and evidences of true conversion. It was necessary for us to bestow some attention on this part of the work, treating as we have designed to do, the duty of a public profession of religion in its general bearings on all classes. Hence the first plea of those we shall examine, by reason of which many proper candidates for church communion exclude themselves, is that arising from *doubtful evidences of conversion*, and, as it has been stated to us in some cases, from *assumed incompetency owing to a very low and weak degree of religion*.

It is painful to see, as we often do, some of the best of men so exercised with doubts and fears as to their condition, whilst others who have but little grace are full of vain confidence. Yea, we often find men who have no mark whatever of having ever passed from death unto life, but the contrary, who yet

pillow themselves up with hopes frail and weak as the rope of sand. That such is the fact, all learned and pious divines and experienced ministers alike attest, and this very fact alone ought to silence the dark suspicions of those who, although hopeful to others, appear determined never to leave writing bitter things against themselves. Perhaps the portraiture of true conversion which we have given in our last chapter may tend rather to excite than allay their fears, and the whole course of our previous thought might lead them to despondency, and scare them from that habitation which is above all an asylum, an ark of safety, repose, and solace to the weak and trembling pilgrim. In silencing the presumptuous hopes of the self-deceiver, which is a necessary duty when dwelling on such a subject, there is a danger of discouraging the broken reed. There are two principal sources of this state of mind, which we will briefly notice. The first is an overdrawn standard of what is scripturally requisite to constitute a Christian, and the second a comparison of themselves with very eminent saints. Such conclusions may arise both from certain hyperbolic statements to be found in the scriptures, and from the recorded experience of eminent scripture characters. Were we to look only at a portion of the scriptures, most Christians would find ample reason to call in question the reality of their conversion ; but let us turn to other

parts, and we shall find equal encouragements. Although perfection, as well as sincerity, is justly demanded, yet Christianity admits of very great imperfections of character when associated with true sincerity, as is evident both from the declarations and promises of scripture. We have there the fact broadly stated, that there are various degrees of piety, and that of very wide disproportion, as much as between natural differences of age, strength, and stature in men. Thus we read of "babes in Christ," and of "grown men;" of "new born babes," of "young men," and of "old men," of some who are "strong," and of others who are "weak." Some are styled "trees of righteousness," "plants of renown," that grow "like cedars in Lebanon;" others are but "a bruised reed," which is almost the weakest and feeblest specimen of vegetative nature. Some possess grace in such abundance and lively exercise, that they have the "spirit of burning," and others are but "smoking flax." We read in the Canticles of trees of all sorts in Christ's orchard—of the saffron and spikenard, the calamus and cinnamon, and those of frankincense, aloes, and myrrh, which are specified by the Spirit, as it has been, we believe, justly concluded, to denote Christians of various order and size. Spikenard and saffron, which are tender plants, that scarcely raise their heads above the ground, are young and weak followers of Christ.

Calamus and cinnamon, which are shrubs of two cubits high, are Christians of a middle order; whilst the others just named refer to more eminent and shining characters in Christ's church.

But not only is this the fact, that as Christians our attainments may be very low, and also that Christ regards the green buds as well as the ripest and richest fruit, and has commanded his church to do the same, but we believe it alike true that there are more young and weak than there are old and full grown Christians. The kingdom of grace here resembles that of nature and providence. Thus in a garden there are more young slips than old roots, and in a city more young children than men advanced in years. In Nineveh there were 120,000 infants, but there were not, doubtless, an equal number of old men. Beauty, wealth, wisdom, and honour, are comparatively rare. Where there is one thus distinguished, there are a hundred who cannot claim any title to their possession. Let us turn to the living creatures that people the earth, the air, and the sea, and we still discover that what is small far exceeds that which is great. There are but few churches, as well as Christians, whom we should be justified in addressing as Paul did the Romans: "I am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge; able also to admonish one another." Let not any be deterred from joining those whom

they believe to be far superior to themselves, for this is the very reason why they should unite, as much as why the ignorant should seek the society of the wise. The church is a tabernacle for those "coming up from the wilderness," most suitable for the weak, faint, and sickly. It is there they grow, when elsewhere they might languish, till the small sprig becomes a tall cedar, and the smoking flax a burning and brilliant lamp in God's candlestick. It is not the measure, but the reality of faith which constitutes us believers. You may be different from other Christians, and yet have the same spiritual nature. You may not have the same degree of emotions with those with whom you dread comparison, and yet have the same kind. A little child is of the same species, a member of the human family, equally with the giant. Grace, like nature, is more bountiful to some than to others. It is the same sun that shines on the low and little reed that shakes with the gentle breeze, as on the robust and lofty monarch of the forest that defies the whirlwind. You are not to judge of yourselves by the recorded experiences of scripture characters, or of Christian biography, for we have here not only some of the greatest of saints, but the greatest of saints in their most spiritual experience. But even these had great imperfections, and were not always on the mount. The Christian's experience may be truly

said to be both a continued constancy and inconstancy; although not altogether and alone the religion of frames, and seasons, and circumstances, its changes from intensity to torpor are often principally the result of these. But it is as sincere and real in the one state as the other,—like the wind, the constituent elements of which are ever the same though admitting of various combinations, which is now subsiding into calmness and now rising into excitation, from a variety of impelling agents. There is much natural corruption as well as 'gracious influence even in the best of Christians, and when comparing yourselves with others, you must remember that you are not acquainted with their sins, their coldness and barrenness, or their false and impure motives, in private devotion, sanctuary services, and religious usefulness, nor yet with their secret misgivings. You must, therefore, decide on your spiritual state, not by the attainments of others, nor yet even by the absolute requirements of God's word, but by the evidences already mentioned in our previous chapter. If you can lay any claim, however small, to these, it is your bounden, immediate duty to consociate with some Christian society in fellowship, "breaking of bread, and in prayers." In vain do you attempt to excuse yourself by the plea that you are not yet good enough, and that you must wait till you are better, and a more suitable asso-

ciate for the holy family of a holy God. You may with equal truth say, as a sinner, that you are not good enough to come to Christ. All that is required is, that you be a true believer, a real convert. Should you actually be the least and lowest of Christ's disciples, the duty is as binding, yea, more so, on you than the highest style of Christians; for the church on earth, unlike that above, is more of a hospital than a palace; and whereas you are now but a stunted, you might, by complying with the orders of Christ, become a flourishing Christian. This act of obedience will itself prove aliment to your soul. If, therefore, you have, dear reader, but one spark of grace, we would, with anxious importunity, thus address you, in the words of Bunyan, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without."

The next objection we shall proceed to undermine is that arising *from the fear of dishonouring the Christian name and injuring the Christian cause*. This plea appears, at first sight, amiable and plausible, but truth and justice, yea, even mercy itself, so far from extending towards it indulgence, will all be found, as soon as their true voice is heard, to treat it with severity. If this is justifiable in one instance, it must be in others; for the strongest, both scripture history, experience, and observation alike declare, are liable to

fall ; and such falls on the part of eminent and strong Christians, or mere professors, proves more scandalous and injurious than the falls of weak and young disciples. Thus when Phygellus and Hermogenes fell, all Asia turned away with them. For confirmation of this statement see 2 Sam. xii. 14 and 1 Cor. viii. 10. Were such an apology well founded, therefore, there could be no profession of religion and no church in the world. It is true there are many professors who are but hypocrites ; many more justly chargeable with such grievous inconsistencies, as to leave one in doubt whether they have root ; so that if they do not, like other professors, live in open sin, they do more harm than good by publicly identifying themselves with those high and holy principles which they defame. But with equal reason may you assert, that you will not be a Christian at all because some real Christians have disgraced the name ; or that you will cease to reside in your native country because there are so many wicked characters whom it harbours ; or that you will refuse to attend the means because it will increase your responsibility. If we refer to pure Christian churches, where strict discipline is maintained, we shall find a far larger number of fair and honourable professors than the contrary ; and besides, this cannot affect the question, for we can never reason from the perversion of any thing, as is done

by those who allege this pretext, for in such case we might reason against the gift of the Holy Spirit, and against the grace of God, which men have turned into lasciviousness. Suppose even that there were but very few Christians acting up to their profession, the majority discrediting it, this would only be a stronger reason why you should immediately make a profession, to wipe away such reproach; for a child, if sincerely concerned for the welfare of his parents and family, so far from fleeing his father's house and renouncing his family on account of the disgraceful conduct of a brother, would only be more anxious to uphold its honour. And the true subject, always ready to swear allegiance to his true sovereign, is then most full of public professions of loyalty when other subjects, who professed subjection, prove traitors. Those even who are afraid of public profession, will advocate and contend for the necessity of private and domestic profession, bringing forward that command of our Lord, "Let your light so shine before men," &c.; but in so doing they plainly contradict their own reasoning here, as this objection is equally valid against even saying a word in favour of religion, even to a child or a servant, or even performing any act of duty whatever, as a subsequent practical contradiction of the same would bring the same ridicule and reproach on religion; so that a man must cease to be a Christian alto-

gether on such a principle. Besides, if you should not come up to that high standard of consistency which you say is necessary to support your profession with any becoming honour ; if others are offended, they will equally sin with yourself, as religion, every honest mind knows, like every thing else, is not to be judged of by its professors, but by its principles ; by its truly legitimate, and not its spurious, illegitimate results.

This objection, it is to be feared, often arises not so much from spiritual delicacy as from that of censoriousness and uncharitableness. The greatest ornaments in the church have had not only their habitual failings, but their occasional falls ; not only have they evinced those defects of temper or conduct which are not cognizable by church discipline, but are to be corrected alone by private remonstrance or by the clear and comprehensive practical enforcement of divine truth, but also those open breaches on Christian morality which have justly exposed them to ecclesiastical excommunication. But many of these, who, like Peter, have grievously fallen, have more than recovered from its injurious effects ; they have amply avenged themselves on him who was wishing to sift them as wheat, and have subsequently adorned and strengthened far more than they dishonoured and weakened, the Christian church and cause ; so that, though allowing sin is no where so odious, inju-

rious, hardening, and awful as in a professor, yet it is evident that many such Christians have become more humble, purified, fortified in grace, exemplary, and useful by reason of such falls. But do not think that in recommending you "to subscribe with the hand unto the Lord," we anticipate, or would lead you to anticipate, a similar declension and downfall. It is for your honour and happiness, and the honour of your Saviour and of his church, that we say, in reference to profession, "Ye that fear the Lord, keep not silence." We do not say of you, as was once said of one of the kings of Israel, "Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall?" In your present character and condition you are certainly dishonouring and disobeying Christ; you offend the weak by thus acting the sneaker in religion; and whereas if you were united in church bond with those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and thus attest their love, you might be sustained and advanced in the divine life by their prayers, by church-fellowship, and the sacred claims of profession, you act thus most grievously, and have suffered not only privation, but actual difficulties, and temptations, and miseries, from which you would thus have been shielded. No Christian, however much afraid of disgracing such a profession, would say, "I am sure of doing so if I profess." But now, if acquainted with his duty he is posi-

tively, not probably, doing so ; for he is as really, though not as wantonly, sinning as Peter when he denied his Master with oaths ; and not only is he directly violating a solemn, oft-repeated command, but also displaying disrespect towards Christianity, and displaying base ingratitude to him who died for him, whom he will not so much as die for ! No ! whom he will not so much as profess before men.

But this fear of dishonouring your profession is decidedly opposed to your own Christianity. What does the Saviour say to his weak and young disciples ? “ Fear not, little flock.” Is not such anxiety more justly censurable than that of worldly carefulness ? Does it not give the lie to the promises of him who is faithful ? Will it not be your desire, should you profess, to adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour ? and has not God said that he will “ fulfil the desire of those that fear him, and will hear the desire of the humble ?” You are now in the path of danger, because you are not in the path of duty ; but when in God’s way you are also under his wing. Though the faith of some is stronger, yet every real Christian can trust God : And what is his conduct towards the weak and defenceless ? Why it is thus expressed in Deuteronomy : “ He found them in the desert, and in the waste howling wilderness ; he leads them about, he instructs them, he keeps them as the

apple of his eye ; an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone doth lead them." What does Christ say to the church of Philadelphia ? " I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it ; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." You may have less strength, and yet do the same. This very fear, if sincere, is salutary ; and ought to encourage you to come forward ; for, says Paul, " When I am weak then am I strong." But should it continue to have a contrary effect, it is an ungodly, unbelieving fear, against which you should pray and struggle.

The same rule and encouragement which our Saviour laid down to influence our temper and conduct as to temporals, is equally applicable to spiritual duty, temptation, and suffering. " Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow ; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself ; sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Let the reader, then, who has been called by God's grace, no longer parley with unbelief, but close with the invitation of the church, all of whose members would urge him, as Moses entreated his father-in-law, saying, " Come thou with us, and we will do thee good ; for the Lord has spoken good concerning Israel."

The objections we have now been stating are of a speculative nature. There are also practical difficulties, which keep many in visible union with the world and alienation from the church, such as *persecution, worldly losses, fear of man, and a strong natural aversion to publicity.*

This was the case with many in the first ages of Christianity ; and the same motives have too much swayed the minds of many real Christians in every subsequent age, though more frequently, we believe, and with less reason or temptation, in the present than in any past period. The same reasons which render it too hard for many to become disciples of Christ, also keep back many true disciples from a public profession of his name. Worldly respectability, the possession of rank, riches, and wisdom, has engendered worldly compliance, and not only lured to destruction the “vessels of wrath,” but also tarnished the Christianity and sullied the heavenly crown of those who are “vessels of mercy, afore prepared unto glory.” Thus it was with Joseph of Arimathea, who was a rich man, and whom the evangelist describes as “a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews.” Although nominal Christianity is universally confessed and respected, real Christianity still excites opprobrium and opposition on the part of the world, which endeavours, alike by its smiles and its frowns, to deter the Christian man from renouncing its

claims, in obeying the requirements of his high and holy vocation. Those who are after the flesh will ever persecute those who are after the Spirit. Where there is not direct persecution, nor even any opposition, there is general neglect, a species of cold contempt, and sometimes a repelling rudeness and rancour, which are, to persons of sensitive minds, painfully severe. Although none will sneer, ridicule, or despise an acquaintance for the profession of mere speculative or popular, polite Christianity, yet, if worldly minded, they will be disposed to reproach real Christianity, inasmuch as it reproaches them. Where there is respect for religion, and even perhaps real piety, yet if a man, acting up to his conscientious convictions, shall secede from their creed and party, and unite himself with the members of another and, as he believes, purer and more scriptural church, not only will his conduct be oftentimes severely censured, but his motives misrepresented, his reputation undermined, and he shall be subjected to a thousand slights and provocations otherwise unknown.

The man who is accustomed to associate alone with the merely polite and fashionable portion of the professed religious world, and whose own religion extends no further than that of his acquaintance, will scarcely suffer in his presence unpatronized and low-life religion without a frown or a sneer. Here, then, there is both the cross of

shame and suffering from which nature shrinks. This is especially the case when opposition proceeds on the part of parents, guardians, and masters, who exert all their authority and influence, and hold out menaces to scare them from public discipleship. The faith and obedience of such as are thus dependent on those who, though their nearest relations, are spiritually their greatest enemies, are put to the severest test.

But whether the opposition of man be mild or violent, whatever be the worldly or social disadvantages and losses, involving even the united loss of friends, fortune, and fame, all these cannot for a moment be alleged by a true disciple as any excuse for the neglect of that righteousness which Christ has commanded him to fulfil. Thus to fear man is to cease to fear and trust God; to deify the poor, feeble, finite creature, and dethrone the great Infinite Supreme. It is to resign our claims to the Christian character. We need not the express language of scripture to justify such a statement, but its declarations add an emphasis of condemnation, especially in those solemn words which came from the lips of our Saviour, which, we think, must strike terror into timid, irresolute, and selfish spirits, afraid and ashamed of that which should be their joyous song of exaltation. When plainly and positively enjoining the duty of profession, he anticipated these results, painful to

flesh and blood, as following in its train, and the struggle for mastery between these carnal and divine principles and affections; and in so doing unequivocally and forcibly asserts the truth of our position. We feel constrained to give the whole context, as there is not only the duty plainly laid down, but also the great reasons and cheering encouragements, the least consideration of which is more than sufficient to induce instant, entire, and cordial compliance. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. . . . And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. . . . Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother. . . . And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it." The word here translated "confess," is the same in the original as that which is elsewhere rendered "pro-

fees." The reason why our translators have employed these two renderings of the same Greek word is, to denote, not two distinct professions, but the same profession of the same great faith, the same hope and obedience under different circumstances, namely, in times of persecution and in times of tranquility, confession referring to the former and profession to the latter. A confessor, as the reader well knows, is still used by us as synonymous with a martyr, that is one who seals his testimony with his blood ; but a mere professor, if sincere, is one who, though ready, is not called by providence to imitate the confessor persecuted for righteousness' sake. By referring to the following passages the reader may see how the same original term is thus variously rendered in our translation. Matt. x. 32, 33. Heb. iii. 1. 1 Tim. vi. 12. 1 John iv. 15. Heb. xi. 13, 14. Heb. iv. 14.

Let the secret disciple think of him who though for untold ages the highest of the high in heaven, voluntarily became the lowest of the low on the earth ; who, not for himself, but for another, yea, for him, endured the cross and despised the shame, infinitely greater than that to which he is summoned ; and will he not, if his heart contains one generous emotion, with Bethlehem, and Gethsemane, and Calvary before his eye, exclaim with Peter, not indeed in his spirit of presuming self-

confidence, "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake." The fear of man is denounced and overcome as a principle mean, base, and dastardly even by the worldly, who refuse to quail in danger, who brave the direst persecution, and readily submit to death rather than even give up a trifling, worthless punctilio of honour. The political, the scientific, and fashionable world may here shame the Christian, and put to rout his low, unworthy fears. But what infinitely higher reasons and more suasive motives unite to constrain the disciple of Christ to such a course than the votaries of the world! What a contrast between the opposing claims of creature and Creator, time and eternity! But we have been regarding the confessor rather than the professor. There are but comparatively few in our country who have to suffer much privation, loss, or even contempt by incorporating themselves with any section of the Christian church. There is a wide difference between such and Joseph of Arimathea, which the present conduct pursued by the Jews towards their brethren who are converted to Christianity and avow themselves Christians fully illustrates and confirms, for the children are not more bigoted, fierce, and cruel in their deadly hostility towards those of their kindred who profess allegiance to Jesus of Nazareth, than were their fathers. The apprehensions

of those who thus belie their best convictions of duty are often perfectly groundless, as they would meet with nothing worse than indifference. Besides, God has promised to shield and to reward those who serve and obey him. The more we do for God, the more we may certainly expect he will do for us. The more we suffer for him, the more shall we rejoice in him. The greater our loss, the greater our gain. The Hebrew Christians "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods." Not only do we thus promote the honour of Christ and the interests of his kingdom, but in most instances our very worldly prosperity is eventually furthered by that which formerly threatened its destruction. In his present situation the secret disciple has good reason to listen to fear, even in the world, rather than hope, for God's express orders are not to be set at defiance by his people with impunity; but it is the reverse if he disannuls his covenant with the world and leagues himself with the church, for "who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?" Let him consult his own interest and the glory of God, and he will perceive that fellowship with the saints should not only be an article of his creed, but an object of his desire. One of the ancient fathers deemed it a greater honour to be a member of a Christian church, than the head of the Roman empire. If really Christians, you can never be truly happy, or

even enjoy peace, in your present situation if once roused to your duty in this particular ; nor shall you realize, in any fulness of fruition, the presence of Jesus, but only take up your abode within the walls of Zion, and all your forebodings shall by God's grace be hushed to peace, your sufferings more than counterbalanced by a lively and joyful hope, which words are too poor to express and worlds to purchase. Your evidences will brighten as your piety, otherwise doubtful both to yourself and others, shall flourish in the courts of the Lord's house. You shall lose nothing in the world that was worth retaining, and find communion with the church safety and solace to your soul, exclaiming :

" In such society as this
My weary soul would rest ;
The man that dwells where Jesus is,
Must be for ever blessed."

We have enumerated all the pleas deserving of notice, alleged by this class of inconsistent non-professors, as apologies for their breach of Christian obligations. Either a public attestation of individual discipleship, which in some or other form is required and expected on the part of every evangelical church, is wholly unnecessary, and the command, " Eat ye all of it," has no weight of authority, or these silent and fearful followers of Christ are

living in the constant neglect of an ordinance, and the violation of a great public duty, scripturally imperative on all, and are thus chargeable alike with the sin of omission and of commission. There is, there can be, no valid objection whatever but the want of that repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ which constitutes us Christians; nor can there be any other reason assigned for hesitation and delay. Does the disciple tremble at his increased responsibility? Such fear is salutary, and should encourage. His weakness shall be sheltered. Let him pray thus with the apostle thrice, by which we are to understand fervently and frequently, and he shall have the promise realized, "My grace is sufficient for thee." He is now walking on a precipice, he shall then dwell at ease in Zion, and his God and Saviour, instead of saying of him, "I have this against thee," shall utter those sweet words of approval, "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest; and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith." Your present position is a stumbling-block to yourself and to others. "Come out," said a faithful minister to a young lady, "if you would come out, I feel as if a host would follow you." She did so, and whereas otherwise she would, we believe, have continued a feeble, crooked, and crippled disciple, she thus became an eminent saint. Come out, we say to you;

let the frown of faith dispel your fears, and no dark shadows shall gather over futurity; and whereas you are now an offence, your lot and character shall then be those of Levi, of whom God thus speaks: "My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn away many from iniquity." Can the reader tolerate the thought, that secret piety is sufficient, that he has religion enough, or that he has not sufficient to justify a profession, or that he will as a professor be called to greater strictness and consistency? We answer, that Christianity has made no provisions for secret discipleship, yea, that she absolutely requires profession, that the other two pleas are founded on self-righteousness inconsistent with the reality of true faith, whilst the last, followed out, would lead to the entire abandonment of duty and consistency. He that would thus wilfully offend in the least, would also in time offend in the greatest. In fine, there can be no pleas advanced against our making a public profession of Christianity but what may with equal truth and reasonableness be urged against our becoming Christians, whilst there exists the same reasons for our professing as for our possessing the holy and blessed religion of

Jesus. Let the hearer, then, if reluctant thus to show himself openly, suspect, as well he may, the reality of his piety ; for, says Christ, "He that is not with me is against me ;" and to be with him must mean to be with his. "What concord hath Christ with Belial ? or what part he that believeth" (savingly) "with an infidel" (practically) ? Or if he feels conviction, let him at once break truce with the world, and enter into association and alliance with the visible church, which, however imperfect, and her imperfections are often egregiously and slanderously exaggerated, is yet the best exemplar, the fairest type, and the most promising seed of the invisible church in glory. Let him esteem it his honour and happiness not only to be a Christian, but to declare himself a Christian, and let his resolution be in the strength of God to enter at once on this most solemn and binding engagement, to which duty, gratitude, and his own best interests alike most urgently invite, exclaiming,

" Now I am thine, for ever thine,
 Nor shall my purpose move ;
 Thy hand hath loosed my bond of sin,
 And bound me with thy love :
 Here in thy courts I leave my vow,
 And thy rich grace record ;
 Witness, ye saints, who hear me now,
 If I forsake the Lord."

CHAPTER VI.

DIRECT AND CONVINCING ARGUMENTS WHY EVERY REAL CHRISTIAN SHOULD MAKE A PROFESSION.

WE shall now proceed to mention some of the great considerations which should prevail on the class we are addressing to make a public profession of the name of Christ. We shall not be able, indeed, to say as much as we desired on this part, or as its importance demands, but we will not, however, conclude ere we have convinced all real Christians, whose minds are open to conviction, that the reasons for profession are as strong and substantial as the pleas and apologies for neglecting this part of God's revealed will are shadowy and untenable.

The first great argument by which we would enforce the duty of publicly testifying our adherence to Christ is that drawn *from scripture authority*.

The entire and universal scope of practical Christianity, as well as certain positive preceptive tenets, the example and exhortations of the apos-

ties, and the practice of the primitive Christians, alike combine to prove that the open avowal of discipleship is not optional, or dependent on circumstances, but strictly obligatory; so that to prove recusant here is to neglect an indispensable, imperative duty, binding alike on all real Christians. What language can more authoritatively state this duty, and charge it on the conscience, than the following? "Whosoever shall *confess*" (or profess) "me before men, him will I confess also before my Father who is in heaven." "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels." "Do this in remembrance of me." "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." The apostle here means, no doubt, to confess his name; and there was shame

connected with profession when Christians were "the off-scouring of all things." "That thou mayest say to the prisoners, go forth; to them that are in darkness, show yourselves." The inspired apostles, under the special influence of the Holy Spirit, by their injunctions and conduct add divine sanctions to these solemn requisitions. By their authority all true converts to their faith were united into distinct societies or churches. None were received but baptized believers, after a confession of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus, and none who thus came were rejected; nor is there on record a single instance either in the Acts or the epistles, of any true believer neglecting this duty, or backward in its performance. We read, indeed, of lax church discipline, and of the unhallowed observance of the Lord's supper, and of unwarranted, because false profession, and of apostacy, but never of Christians turning their back to the church, and practically despising the sacrament. Profession and church-fellowship immediately followed the believing reception of the gospel. "And as many as gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day were added to the church three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." Although the furnace of persecution was heated seven times, although profession was often

followed, and was perpetually in danger of encountering not only loss of reputation, but of liberty, property, and life, yet so far from tolerating timorous seclusion, it was sternly prohibited; nor did any style or believe themselves Christians, nor were any recognized for a moment by any party as such, who refused to give, in common with the church, a visible indication of their Christianity. And if fear in those troublous times was denounced, can groundless pusillanimity be tolerated in the present friendly age? If Christ had ever connived at or regarded with leniency a mere private profession, it would have been then; but no! he commanded one and all to profess his name "before men," though by so doing bonds, imprisonment, and death should await them.

In order to weaken the force of these positive statutes of Christ's kingdom, a distinction has been put forward between the essentials and circumstantialia of Christianity. But let it be conceded that a public profession is not a term indispensable to salvation, and that there are a great number of members of Christ's spiritual church not enrolled in his visible church, still this cannot in the least invalidate our argument. Many who neglect to fulfil the public claims of Christ's cross are comparatively ignorant of their duty in this particular, and besides, we can never fairly reason in respect to moral or religious obligation from others to

ourselves, for though we may be guided, we must not be governed by example, but by law. Sincere obedience, though imperfect, is always universal. "Then are ye my friends when ye do *whatsoever* I command you." If we will thus knowingly and wilfully violate Christ's express orders, may we not, under cover of the same reasonings, give up every duty? Does it not indicate and prove a settled spirit of disloyalty, by which we endanger our acceptance with God? The test of obedience in Paradise had not the same high moral and religious claims as this law, pronounced with equal authority, and which, though not the turning-point of salvation, is yet one of the decisive proofs on which depends the scriptural evidence of our obedience. May we not thus explain away almost every duty, with the exception of repentance and faith, and at once declare what we will or will not obey, and how far our obedience shall extend? This is not the spirit of the dutiful child or subject, much less of the dutiful Christian; and those who would thus seek to defend themselves against the claims of Christ and his church, instead of resting with complacency on any such fallacious comparison, may hereafter tremble when Christ, sitting on his tribunal, shall say to him, "This oughtest thou to have done, and not left the other undone."

Let us turn from these direct instructions and admonitions to the whole tenor of scripture, and we

shall find abundant intimations to the same effect. Its precepts and promises, and its doctrines and representations, all concur to establish the fact, that we are not to keep our religion to ourselves, not to hide it in a bushel, but that, as responsible for others as well as for ourselves, we are to give every kind of proper, prudent publicity, especially that which God has himself required of us as being alike honourable to him, cheering to his church, and impressive and salutary to the world. There may be passages that appear to speak lightly of, or even decry profession, but then we are always to understand that specious profession which is worn and assumed as a "covering for deceit." There are passages also that condemn ostentation, but publicity is not ostentation ; and hence, though we are not like the pharisees to give alms and make long prayers, and in mere private acts of piety and charity not to let our right hand know what our left hand doeth, yet we must let our lights shine before men. They must shine, though not blaze. And how can we better fulfil this precept, backed as it is by concurring passages from both Old and New Testaments, than in imitating Timothy, by "making a good profession before many witnesses," and practically remembering the high responsibilities of the same in our conversation in the church and our walk in the world.

The second argument by which we would win

the hopeful non-professor who feels decided in his heart for God and his Christ, is that derived from the constitution and character of Christian churches. It is in reference to the church, in its associate capacity, that some of the most endearing terms of appropriation are applied, the richest promises addressed, as well as the highest privileges allotted ; to all of which the secret disciple can lay no claim. Let us consider its purely spiritual character, a "kingdom not of this world ;" the materials of which it is constructed, styled by the apostle, "lively stones, built up a spiritual house," its headship and administration under Jesus Christ alone, entirely dependent of all human control. Its design, which is to be God's witness, the depository of the truth, the visible line of demarcation between Christ and mammon, and the light of the world ; in its sacramental feast, by which it shows forth the Lord's death to the world, and partakes of, whilst commemorating and honouring, his grace ; in its influence, striking the beholder with attention and admiration, and communicating both pleasure and profit, as it unitedly sends forth the healing steams of truth and purity : under all these aspects there are powerful reasons that should urge every true believer to covet an entrance and a home within the gates of Zion.

But there is one great principle designed by Christ, when he erected for himself a spiritual

temple, builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit, and that is union. No one can read his last discourse to his disciples, whose prayers are commands, nor yet the epistles of his favourite disciple, without feeling the great importance, yea, the absolute necessity of a close compact amongst his followers. They are declared to be one family, the "household of faith," "one body," and "members one of another." But whatever mere, outward union may exist, there cannot in any other way be the fraternal union of organization, there cannot otherwise be visible and palpable brotherhood; and so the precepts and the designs of Christ are thus far neglected and frustrated. It will be said, by some, that our churches often sow dissensions. This, however, is only arguing from the perversion of an institution. The same argument might be alleged against the domestic system, where brothers kindle dissensions unknown abroad; but such are generally the result of close intimacy, are by no means incompatible with very close union and cordial affection, so that these collisions often increase, rather than diminish, mutual esteem, confidence, and affection.

In order to Christian combination and exertion, there must be mutual confidence; but so long as you continue neglecting this public manifestation of piety, which is a most important part of your religious duty, the church, though availing herself of

your aid, cannot but regard you and your conduct with many scruples. That there are such singular, inconsistent Christians, who contribute largely in many ways to the advance of the Redeemer's empire, we admit; but these, we believe, would be far more useful, however much they may question the fact, by thus adding their example and influence in favour of the church already established. Whilst thus nominally neutral, and apparently disguised and fighting by stealth, though really allying themselves as fellow-labourers with the people of God, their assault on the enemies of God and truth is like that of a broken, straggling army, who, however courageously each trooper may maintain the combat, can never expect to equal that of a well organized phalanx, rendered powerful by discipline; to which, on the contrary, the proceedings of a Christian society, associated in church-fellowship, may be as justly compared. The promotion of this union, the secret of all strength and success, and the claims of brotherly love, a feature so broadly and strongly delineated in the true Christian, must, if fairly and fully developed, tend to constrain those who, embracing the faith and hope of the church, are yet alienated from her communion, to unite themselves with those who have with them united themselves to their common Lord and Saviour. But not further to anticipate what we intend to include under a

general division, we proceed to notice, in the next place, the direct and large advantages ensuing from a public recognition of the claims of Christ.

In the first place, in reference to yourself, it will efface the stain of inconsistency, lukewarmness, and indecision, give repose to an unsettled mind, and an uneasy, accusing conscience, and add honour to your piety. If your eye is single as you grow in knowledge, it must add now to your condemnation and disquietude, and you will have no capacity either to derive pleasure or profit from ordinances; whilst the more you hear, and know, and feel, the more will your conscience be defiled. You will not be able to enjoy your religion any more than exemplify its power, unless the light that is in you be darkness; and should you continue stifling your convictions, you may resemble those, and they are by no means few, whom we would hold out to you as beacons of terror, to awe and affright you from your present dangerous posture, who after giving every evidence of personal piety but this, have thus so resisted and grieved the Holy Ghost as gradually to produce the extinction of heart-felt piety, and eventually turn out the most guilt-stained and hardened of backsliders and apostates. But should you not thus suffer from confining your religion in the narrow, selfish chambers of your own heart or home, yet you will and must repulse the Holy Spirit, who though free

and sovereign, either wholly or partially departs when his wise and holy solicitations are thus ill-required. But not only do you thus wrest from the Spirit the weapon which God has appointed to employ against your foes, and the foes of the church, but you also refuse to give the great Immanuel the honour which he so infinitely deserves, and not only so but you actually dishonour him by apparently siding with his enemies. You are now professedly one of the world, which scripture declares is "the enemy of God;" and distinguishing the church from the world, the apostle John says, speaking of the professed church, "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." You are in the Philistines' camp, if not on his side; though not really, you are virtually countenancing and supporting the rebel army against their good and rightful Sovereign, to whom, as a Christian, you must give your best affections, and devote your noblest energies. But if no longer conferring with flesh and blood, you separate and sanctify yourself in the sacred inclosure of the church, you then proclaim what you will delight and glory in publishing at the last great day; and why not avow the same, with somewhat similar triumph and transport, now? "I continue no longer leagued with or like you, ungrateful, disobedient, and wicked world, the slave of Satan and the enemy of Christ, but now I am

his, and he is mine." Thus the world witnesses a new-raised adversary, and receives a stab, whilst the church welcomes a new friend and recruit. This proof of obedient love endears you to the Saviour and the Saviour to you. The bright and morning star shines fairer, the rose of Sharon becomes more fragrant. You approach nearer the good Shepherd, who resides principally, like his flock, in the fold. You are also admitted into friendly fellowship with the family of God, to whom, however previously amiable your disposition or creditable your character, however you apparently acquiesced in gospel doctrine, you were too much like Saul, when after his conversion he came to Jerusalem. The prayer which you had formerly frequently presented, but which as your conduct gave the lie to your petition, had never been commissioned to return from heaven laden with blessings, is now graciously and richly answered. "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people : O visit me with thy salvation ; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance." You thus gain an interest in the prayers, and sympathies, and support of the church, whose ministers and members cast around you their affectionate arms. You are profited by witnessing the spiritual wisdom and piety often peculiar to church-meetings and

fellowship, all of which may largely contribute to your safety, comfort, help, and advancement in religion. Many temptations arising from your former position are wholly removed, or else greatly weakened ; worldly compliances and associations opposed to or else uncongenial with Christian principle, are no longer, as before, required or expected. You breathe a purer atmosphere, and walk on higher ground. You form for yourself, as the church and the world also forms for you, an enlarged and ennobled religion ; and the higher the standard by which we measure ourselves and are rated by others, and by which we profess to act, the more anxious and ardent are we not to degrade ourselves by falling beneath the distinguished elevation. And if the apostle could appeal to our faith, and urge us to lay aside every weight by a great crowd of invisible witnesses, as some suppose he means, how much more likely are we, as creatures of sense, to be roused to circumspection, activity, and stedfastness, by the thought that we are under the lynx-eyed surveillance of a censorious world, and of a church jealous for her honour, and therefore “jealous over you with a godly jealousy.” By thus pledging yourself to a religious course, you add motive to motive and line to line, in defence of every virtuous resolution and in defiance of every temptation to declension. Your former false delicacy has brought a eloud

upon your soul, cast a dark shadow on your character, and filled your solitude with sorrow, but your evidences here will be brightened. It is not sufficient that we go round the bulwarks of Zion, and tell the towers thereof, we must enter within her holy precincts, and partake of the rich feast served out at the royal table in her palaces; and then shall we know that the Lord of Hosts is with us, and the God of Jacob is our refuge. And what is so adapted as a mean and ordinance to strengthen and sanctify, as the partaking of that most affecting symbol of his death and memento of his love, which is the earnest of salvation? What better adapted, as prayer and praise alternately ascend to heaven, and the soul, as it were, sees Jesus Christ evidently set forth crucified, to increase our faith and love to Christ, and to confirm and perpetuate the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? On such a survey of the immunities and pleasures of church-communion, will not the reader feel constrained to add, with the poet, "Enter, my soul, with cheerful haste," as we quote his words of truth?

"Behold the portal wide displayed,
The building strong and fair;
Within are pastures fresh and green,
And living streams are there."

Although not able to read the heart, yet if we interpret its thoughts and feelings by the conduct,

it would appear that there are persons who believe themselves to be Christians, and who yet regard their duty in this particular as a grievance to be dreaded rather than as a blessing to be solicited ; that to put on Christ in his ordinances, is to cover oneself with confusion and sackcloth rather than the garments of praise and salvation ; that to confess that we are Christians was a term of reproach as much as to confess that we are atheists ; that to be admitted into church-fellowship was to be received in a poor-house or imprisoned in a lonesome cell, rather than welcomed and entertained in a rich and noble mansion, where the high and holy guests hold joyful festival, a pledge and preparative of "the marriage supper of the Lamb ;" that to unite oneself with the noblest, wisest, and most useful society in the world, was to form alliances unpleasing and unpropitious. Let us only carry out to its legitimate extent the principle and disposition we have been considering, as practically manifested in respect to decision for Christ in the way of his appointment, and the whole of Christianity becomes a servile yoke rather than, as it actually is, restoration from such a state to perfect freedom ; and that Christ has enjoined on his disciples what is unreasonable, trifling, and injurious, rather than what is substantially important and blessed. Such sentiments and feelings may be suitable to the unconverted character, who has no

taste for spiritual things, but do they not, if tolerated in the heart, ought they not to make a man tremble for his immortal soul as in jeopardy?

Consider the beneficial results of profession on the church and the world. These partly follow from what we have already considered. To proclaim Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of all that come to him for life, our obligations to him, and our devotedness to his service, this is to make him known as well as to swell the chorus of his praise in the world; and it is also calculated to revive and strengthen the faith, and love, and obedience of the church, each one of whom is thus helped on in his journey to heaven. We are social beings, and as such act upon one another; a word, a look may prove influential to all eternity; and indifference to practical religion is as contagious as actual hostility, and hence every new professor gives a check and rebuke alike to speculative and practical infidelity towards man's Mediator with his God, stirs up the thoughtless to serious inquiry, and supports, with all the force of his example and influence, that holy and blessed religion to which he publicly avows adhesion. He becomes admonitory to the world, an eloquent contrast, and a way-mark to Christ and to heaven, as the Christian church may be said to represent and hold forth, as in a dramatic performance, each doctrine and appeal of the cross. The force of example is

alike recognized and confessed by philosophy and Christianity. "Because iniquity shall abound," says our Saviour, "the love of many shall wax cold." Hence the secret of revivals of religion, which, though the operation of God is, like all God's operations, not directly miraculous, does not contravene the general procedure of human character and action. But every thing connected with publicity is far more impressive and influential than what is private, and hence to overlook this duty is to neglect one of the finest opportunities afforded us in the course of our present probation to honour Christ, benefit his church, and to preach practically to the world, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world!" "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" As the duty is equally binding with all the weight of scripture authority, so is it equally beneficial when performed on the part of the respectable, moral character as of the notoriously immoral, because counteracting in this case that natural self-righteousness common to man, the former thus testifying as strongly to the opponent of the scripture doctrine of salvation by grace, against that merit he claims, as the latter does to the reality and efficacious power of that grace he denies.

Profession gives conspicuousness to the church, so as to attract the gaze of the world; and in order to shine she must be seen; to subdue, she must

come into palpable collision with her inveterate foe. It also strengthens as well as enlarges her borders. Now the professing, visible church, is God's great chosen instrumentality for the salvation of the world ; and for a single, isolated Christian to invade the domain of the prince of darkness, is not only to overlook the advantage of direct junction and consolidation,—it is not only to present to the enemy a less formidable array ; but it is to act in contravention of Infinite Wisdom, who has set up a church not only for the personal benefit of its members, but in order to perpetuate and extend his name in the world. What should we think of either the wisdom or obedience of the soldiers who would refuse to fight in the way appointed by the general and sanctioned by the rest of the army, and who, though willing to act in concert against the enemy, practically despised their discipline ? A public profession has also its social advantages. Some appear to think that they may be more useful to their relatives and friends by not publicly professing Christianity ; but how can indecision and inconsistency be more influential for good than decision and consistency, which, however much the world may dislike, they always respect ? Is it to be expected that the disobedient servant will be more useful, and honoured, and blessed by his Master than the dutiful ? A private and social profession all will allow to be absolutely indispen-

sable to constitute the Christian character ; but I can scarcely apprehend how these can be even sincere and real, much less consistent and spiritually productive, disunited from that which is alike commanded and essential. In a Christian land there are but few decent, creditable characters but will readily declare themselves Christians both at home and abroad, and who would not even be offended if their Christianity was not admitted, and who will also regularly attend a place of worship, and contribute something towards religious societies, and this is especially the case amongst dissenters, and who yet are altogether worldly and hostile to evangelical religion. How then can we truly and thoroughly unmask ourselves but by publicly denying the world, and entering the pale of the church ? “ From you,” says the apostle, writing to the Thessalonian church, “ sounded out the word of the Lord.”

We forbear to accumulate more reasonings and facts, as we easily might do, to prove the great and manifold personal, social, and public advantages attached to the public profession of Christianity. By so doing Christ is far more highly honoured than by secret attachment and concealed allegiance, to which he has expressed his decided disapprobation, the individual and the church more honoured, fruitful, and happy,—for the “ trees of righteousness,” like many of those of nature, grow

and flourish best in plantations,—and the claims of the world are most firmly and fully resisted, and the empire of Satan most courageously and successfully invaded and overthrown.

We shall now proceed to another consideration, on which, however, as it must have suggested itself to every one who has “tasted that the Lord is gracious,” we shall not enlarge; this is the infinite honours justly due to our exalted Saviour by all his creatures, as being essentially one with the Father, and the infinite debt of gratitude which his followers, whom he has purchased with his own blood, owe to him as their Redeemer.

He is the only Mediator between God and man, the only salvation and hope of a fallen creation. To refuse to honour him is to refuse to honour the Father. To extol him is the highest exhibition of piety, to neglect to do so the most sullen trait of impiety. The supreme, unrivalled dignity of his station, the great, amiable, and infinitely admirable attributes of his nature, and the undeserved, gracious sacrifices and sufferings to which he stooped to raise us from hell to heaven, ought to render us ready to suffer ten thousand martyrdoms if summoned by his appeal or conducive to his praise. Shall we be ready to pay adulation to princes full of imperfection, and not give forth this utterance of our allegiance to the King of kings. No! the true Christian not only receives Christ as his

Saviour, but also honours him as his Sovereign, and as he himself declares, whosoever does not take up his cross and follow him is not worthy of him. Is it credible that he should invite any one of his disciples to his feast, to commemorate, according to his express command, his undeserved, unequalled shame and suffering, that death of deaths, and as the bond and cement of union with his disciples, saying, "Eat, O friend; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved;" and yet that disciple continue to make excuse?

Can we be his disciples whilst we hesitate or defer to profess that name which is above every name in heaven or earth, or under the earth, at the bare sound of which every knee should bow, and every tongue confess? Can we put him off with the relics of the world, to whom superlative love and entire fidelity, to whom the first-fruits, the best of all we have are imperatively due? No! one principle alone can correspond with the magnificence of his goodness, a principle of universal consecration. Remember, dear reader, that the opportunity of honourably professing Christ before men is short, and the omission of it irreparable. What is there to recommend a profession to us, but is to be found in the profession of devotion to the Author of eternal salvation? What clear, convincing, overwhelming arguments and appeals to our understanding, our conscience, and affec-

tions ! Who would not be ambitious, and ardent, and impatient to declare himself the disciple of such a Master, the copy of such an original ? Consider but a moment the majesty of him of whom we thus profess ourselves servants, yea, his friends, his brethren ; the everlasting honour and happiness accruing to us from this act of open inauguration into his service, which is freedom, victory, riches, and empire ; the quality of our fellow-professors, —the greatest and best of whom this world can boast, and the angels of light, glorified saints, and crowned martyrs, the princes of his court, the heavenly nobility, not one of whom, if permitted, but would exultingly and rapturously leave his beatific, radiant presence to profess him before a gainsaying world ; and also the nature of the profession, which is at once obligatory, sublime, and excellent, becoming and dignifying to an intellectual, immortal soul, that is spiritual by nature and divine by grace.

It were easy for us to add further corroboration to our important argument, but our prescribed limits require us to desist. Others might bring forward much more than we have done, or could do, had we as much space as we have inclination to continue in this track. But however small or mean our contribution, we have advanced enough to enlighten those who have been hitherto thoughtless

and careless, to silence the scruples of the reluctant, and to decide the wavering.

We have said that we have no doubts respecting the final safety of many who have never thus been consecrated to Christ; but this refers to those whose religious knowledge and privileges are small and scanty. But, considering the nature and obligation of the Christian profession, we dare not affirm the same of those who have perused our pages. It is unquestionably one of the statutes of Christ's kingdom, and he who refuses to obey is in imminent and awful danger of being ultimately disowned by Christ, as his own words abundantly testify. Omission is equally sin with commission, and will alike destroy the soul. This fact is repeatedly stated in scripture, and is also confirmed by the united testimony of all orthodox Christians. The character of the man not "valiant for the truth," is associated by the prophet with the grossly wicked, as though not to be "valiant for the truth" was as sinful in God's sight as positive and gross transgression. "But they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth: for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the Lord." The slothful and unprofitable servant is styled "wicked," although not one single sin of commission is laid to his charge. It is directly declared in the liturgy of the church of England,

and still more so in the Shorter Catechism of the Scottish church, "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." The apostle John states, that whosoever sinneth, by which he undoubtedly means habitually and wilfully, is not born of God, but is of the world and Satan. Sanctification, which is nothing but obedience to the laws and institutions of Christ, ever follows justification, and fruitless faith is richly possessed by devils. It ill becomes us to say what amount of obedience may indicate the Christian; God only knows: but all who wilfully continue in the neglect of so plain and important a duty, have every reason to tremble, however subtle the evasions by which they may be deceiving themselves. And as it respects the class above mentioned, they either have or will bitterly repent of their conduct. We might enumerate many instances of such who then have perceived and felt their duty when too late; what darkness, and fears, and horror have seized their departing spirits! What worlds would they have given to have thus manifested nonconformity to the world, and conformity to the example, and sacraments, and laws of their Saviour! Whilst living they have thus polluted the entire atmosphere which, as Christians, sustained their life, and cast desolation over the whole region of their piety. Death, that might otherwise have been welcomed, and proved the door to an abundant entrance into

the glorious kingdom of their Lord, has filled them with fruitless remorse and fearful forebodings. And if, as their spirits fled, they have been safely received into paradise, they have been saved with difficulty, as by fire, by the skin of their teeth. And as they entered their everlasting habitation, heaven, that otherwise might have resounded with gratulation, has, methinks, been almost silent; instead of rejoicings, it has been vocal with a sigh, and its high, and happy, and golden pavements wetted with a flood of tears. And though they may shine, it will be as stars of the least magnitude. Yet not as stars, they will but shine with a faint, glimmering light, along the least bright region of the firmament; and though they will not envy, will ever emulate, but in vain, those glorious stars, who, though once, perhaps, far behind them in privilege, though not in profession, have taken, and will for ever sway, their immortal crowns.

Compared with the argument now advanced, how trifling and unworthy are the objections of the non-professor. We allow that in some cases he may be sincere and honest, though never enlightened and wise, in his scruples. But we believe that, in most cases, the cause lies latent in the heart rather than the judgment, and that were not the dictates of duty silenced by the sophisticated reasonings of false delicacy and unchristian feeling, they would no longer lie skulking in the unob-

truded thicket, but at once run the way of Christ's commandments. Disinclination always finds or makes difficulties ; sloth and cowardice always see a lion in the way, whilst zeal converts hindrances into helps, and hushes the storm into a calm. Let us only seriously and honestly weigh every consideration that might lead to this refusal, and we shall find them strong arguments in favour of this duty instead of the contrary, as much and more than the arguments of infidels have been proved to be valid attestations to the truth and excellency of that religion whose holy requirements are so hostile to depraved self-will and so offensive to intellectual pride.

Does the objector appeal to the inconsistencies of professing Christians? This is a reason why he should join a church, as he would thus be able to exert his influence to the enforcing of ecclesiastical discipline when absolutely required, as also contribute by his superior example in some measure to efface the stigma on religion, and to honour and uphold the now foully blemished church. But we apprehend that of most who allege this plea in self-vindication, its sole origin lies hidden and dark in censoriousness, uncharitableness, and pride ; that it is the spirit of the world, ever influenced by Satan, "the accuser of the brethren," whose infidelity and hatred both to the profession and possession of true Christianity is never really, however seemingly ex-

cited and influenced by the sneer when most just and true, "What these, then, are your professors!" It is, we fear, the pharisee, and not the Christian! Spiritual vices are more odious, according to our Saviour, than carnal vices, and man's wily adversary will not only allow, but assist the pharisee to make away with every other sin whilst he can freely indulge the graceless temper of censoriousness. But if a Christian, we would bid him reflect on a portion of our Lord's sermon on the mount, and the solemn cautions of the apostle, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." "Be not high-minded but fear."

We might prove the same of every other argument, not only defending our position, but actually hurling back the shafts against the objector. There is no reason that may be brought forward against the profession of Christianity but may be urged against Christianity, nor one reason that can be adduced to teach the importance of possessing, but may also enforce the importance of professing, the only true and noble religion in the world. Let all real Christians, then, who are not living in the habitual practice of any known sin, no longer hover between truth and sophistry, Christian duty and carnal conformity, but renouncing his prejudices and fears, come to an immediate determination to bind his heart and his life with the ties of Christ's ordinances, which are not an oppressive

chain, but the confirmation of holiness and the cords of love. Let him stifle his convictions, and he will stifle his religion. Every minute that he procrastinates makes him as clay exposed to the burning sun. He shall not regret, as he must otherwise, but ever rejoice that he here spoke and acted like the psalmist, "I made haste, I delayed not to keep thy commandments;" or in the words of one of our greatest poets and divines—

"Then let our faith grow firm and strong,
Our lips profess his word;
Nor blush nor fear to walk among
The men that love the Lord."

After reading the former part of our work, no one will accuse us of saying aught to lead any not possessed of real religion, to become false professors, and remain hypocrites and living slanderers of our holy religion. We repeat, that we believe a false profession is one of the great errors and evils which ministers should fully and faithfully denounce, as they should alike exhort true believers to put on Christ, and unhesitatingly profess his name. Though the charge might, we believe, be readily substantiated, and will not be denied by her own members when applied to the church of England; yet upon the whole, for we must never judge character by individual acts, but by the general tenor of the life, it cannot be said of dissenting churches, but that

a great majority of their members are decided for God, and act consistently with their profession. Of the former we think we may justly complain spiritually, like the psalmist over the ancient church in his day, "O God, the heathen" (unconverted) "are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps." Let the false professor, especially such as wilfully and knowingly sin in professing, think of what he is doing, and tremble. "Cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing." Let those who have no scripture claims to the character of Christian, no scripture evidence of the great change, let them no longer rest content in their perilous, awful state. A moment's delay may prove their eternal ruin. To such characters, therefore, who do not or who ought not to profess what they do not possess, to them we say, "Flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life." "Escape for thy life: look not behind thee; neither stay thou in all the plain; escape thou to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." Those who do not profess, not having any warrant to do so, and those who have either deceived themselves or others, "holding the truth in unrighteousness," alike constitute but one class; and spurious, odious professors can present no more valid reason why true disciples should not

own their allegiance to their Lord by a reference to the one than to the other. May God grant that all our readers who have not yet given their hearts to the greatest Friend of fallen, forlorn humanity, may renounce the service of Satan, and no longer idling within the attraction of a whirlpool, come within the life-giving attraction of the cross. And may those who have given themselves to the Lord, like the ancient disciples, forthwith give themselves to the church, as God has most plainly and strictly commanded ; and may they that name the name of Christ depart from iniquity, be filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God, so we thy people, and sheep of thy pasture, will give thee thanks for ever, we will show forth thy praise to all generations.

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